

THE
BRUTE

W. DOUGLAS NEWTON



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HIS HANDS WERE AT THE MAN'S THROAT.

[page 93]

THE BRUTE

BY

W. DOUGLAS NEWTON

AUTHOR OF

"DOUBLE-CROSSED," "LOW CEILINGS," "GREEN LADIES," ETC.



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK :: LONDON :: MCMXXIV

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AUG 11 1924
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PASSENGERS	1
II. WHEN CIPRIANO SMILES	7
III. EVEN THE BEAST HAS BEAUTIES	17
IV. CUSTOMS OF THE COUNTRY	25
V. THE DOUBLE QUEST	30
VI. MASTER	41
VII. PASCOBAS MANŒUVRES	48
VIII. NERVE WINS	53
IX. LILIAS	62
X. MY LADY DEVIL	70
XI. "ALL THINGS BETRAY THEE"	89
XII. JUNGLE DARKNESS	102
XIII. TRICKERY	106
XIV. HUNTER AND RESCUER	117
XV. THE TANGLE	131
XVI. TIED HANDS	136
XVII. IN TERMS OF LOOT	147
XVIII. GREEN GLOOM TRAILS	161
XIX. THE AVIADORS	175
XX. THE DAGO PRISON	188

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXI.	THE WAY OF CAVALIEROS	194
XXII.	FELTON PROVES HIMSELF	214
XXIII.	INTOLERABLE SAMARITANS	231
XXIV.	THE MAROONED	242
XXV.	SHE IS BEAUTIFUL—ALSO RICH!	248
XXVI.	CIPRIANO CONDESCENDS	263
XXVII.	THE UNSEEN STALKER	273
XXVIII.	FELTON PAYS	287
XXIX.	GLAMOUR	304

THE BRUTE

W. DOUGLAS NEWTON

THE BRUTE

CHAPTER I

THE PASSENGERS

AS the tender drew into the quay half the motley populace of Saluce lined the stringpiece. All the journeyman loafers of the tiny, blotchy, heat-stifled South American port gathered to look at the mad people who had risked their lives by coming off the liner in so dangerous a sea. Also, because they were dagos, their souls rejoiced at the promise of victims to be plucked.

Scores of half-clad men fought their way to front positions. They yelled shrill seductions to the party of four on the tender. Each male siren waved the folded cloth, which was the livery of his union. Those cloths were used for putting between the skull and the baggage that porters always carried on the head. Paul Glen looked down on the shifting rabble with the calm of the large Anglo-Saxon, and thought how near the monkey-house at any Zoo such a spectacle was.

Amusing enough to watch the uproar from the tender. It was a novel sensation. It was the thrilling experience of a strange land, with new manners and types—and smells. Not so pleasant, however, when the party was in the thick of it. The seething mass

The Brute

squirmed and shouted about them in a bewildering chaos. It was only by dint of great alertness and occasionally physical force that Paul and Bevis Probyn prevented avid hands snatching away the bags and boxes of their rather elaborate luggage.

They might, however, have accomplished this miracle had not events taken a swift and unexpected turn. Unseen by the party a number of dagos slipped from the tender. They joined others on the quayside, spoke to them urgently. A signal, and the whole body of these fellows pushed through the crowd of porters throwing them back. The porters yielded as though in fear. In a swarm the men were on to the baggage crying out that they would carry it for the señors, beginning to lift to their heads.

Under that rush the little party was engulfed. It was swamped by the fervour of Latin-America. Anglo-Saxon phlegm had no chance. Paul Glen striving to overawe by his big, neat impressiveness cried: "Hang it all, we don't want all this crowd. Absurd, a mob like this. Tell 'em, Bevis. Tell 'em, Jennifer."

Bevis Probyn, plump, debonnaire, mildly but un-deviatingly calm "told 'em" in fluent Portuguese. So did Jennifer. It was without reaction. The wild-cat mob swarmed clutching and chattering and fighting like monkeys over the boxes and bags.

Lilias Seyler, as sleek and as unruffled as a great cat, smiled: "You can't stop a flood with a gesture. Better flow with the tide and talk big when we're safe on the schooner."

"They're off," laughed Jennifer Daun. "Stick close

The Passengers

to those boxes of money, Paul, that's all we can do."

The rabble of porters was streaming along the docks. The men were still squabbling and fighting over the baggage. The party kept pace as best it could. All were heading for a fine topsail-schooner tied up against a distant arm of the harbour.

Then, quite suddenly, they were not heading for that schooner. The porters swerved and plunged pell-mell into a long, low, dark freight-shed made mazy with piles of merchandise.

"Not there! Not that way!" shouted Paul. "The schooner—hell. . . . What's the Portuguese for 'Go to the schooner,' Bevis?"

Bevis was already shouting it, but without effect. The stream of porters thronged helter-skelter into the musty gloom of the shed, and at once they were all involved in what seemed a frantic, dynastic quarrel. The mass of dagos had in a twinkling become a squirming, pushing, screaming and apparently murdering clot of angry men. The swirl and clamour of their movement added to the stark confusion caused by the abrupt change from the blazing sunlight to semi-darkness. The party felt lost. They were hustled and pushed and swung like chips in an eddy.

Only Bevis kept his head. He knew Latin-America. He understood. He cried: "It's a trick. Look out, Paul. It's a trick to get hold of the money."

His stubby arm hooked savagely and a dago grabbing at one of the boxes of money went over with a yelp.

Then everybody was fighting.

The Brute

The mob abruptly broke off all personal encounters. It swung in upon the party with startling unanimity. No doubt at all that the whole thing was concerted. Paul and Bevis straddling over the precious boxes were slashing right and left. The mob swung against them. Paul drove with both hands. Bevis dug and dug with his left, and his right followed kicking. Three dagos reeled back into the mob, were swallowed and hidden by the snarling, wolf-faced mass which still came on, though the fists swung and swung and even Jennifer and Liliias beat at the greedy brown faces with their parasols.

Men went down right and left and the crowd sucked back. A voice yelled an order, the scum bunched to come again.

“Time for pistols,” panted Paul, and he reached hipward.

“Not yet,” gasped Bevis. “It will mean arrest. That’s playing into their hands.” His fist jerked out again and a too-venturesome scoundrel accomplished a fine backward curve. Then: “God! It is time for guns. . . . They have their knives out.”

The long, wicked curved knives of Latin-America were shining in a dozen hands. The knives swung threateningly, ready to stab, ready to throw.

“They’ll get us,” cried Bevis. “In front of the girls, Paul, they chuck those infernal things. . . . Back behind that heap of bales.”

“We can’t leave the money. We can’t!” cried Jennifer.

“It’ll be murder for all of us if we don’t,” said

The Passengers

Bevis. A knife sang over his head, and, his pistol out in a flash, he fired.

The mob winced, howled, came on to finish them. . . .

And then a big man was in the midst of the rabble, hitting.

He came abruptly, startlingly like a fury loosed from the very air. His bulk was terrific, his power of dealing punishment terrible. His big hands pumped and jabbed as he clove through the mob of dagos. When a fist swung a man went down as though pole-axed. He burst into and scattered the mass so that it broke, stumbled, tangled, fell over, and scrambled all-whither in foolish panic. A scared voice wailed: "O Diabo! . . . O Diabo, Martino!"

A yelp of real fear answered that. The words were taken up in a dozen frightened tones. . . . Martin the Devil was undoubtedly not a man to trifle with. The mob faded into the gloom of the shed as though by magic. Only a greedy few grabbed at certain boxes.

"Those boxes," cried Bevis. "Don't let them get 'em . . . full of money. . . ."

The big man dived straight at the group round the boxes. What he did was too swift to follow, but two men went over with amazing limpness and lay still. And the rest bolted madly.

The big man faced them over the boxes. His height and emphatic power awed them, that power seemed to come out of him with ruthless force. His strong, squared-off face—"Carved out in chunks by an ama-

The Brute

teur with a blunt chopper” was Glen’s sneering opinion of it—with its powerful jaw, tight, firm mouth and puckered and penetrating eyes faced them without friendliness.

Indeed his eyes took on a contemptuous harshness as they swept over the smart clothes and the soft, civilized bearing of the party. He stared from them to the boxes. His foot spurned the latter.

“Money—how, money?” he asked, in a voice queerly calm and cultured. “Specie?”

“Gold sterling,” said Bevis. “I say—you came just in time. We’re awfully grateful.”

“You have reason,” the big man jerked. “People like you, loose with two boxes of gold sterling—*here!* What sort of lunatic millionaire picnic are you?”

Jennifer answered coldly: “We landed to join a schooner in this harbour, the *Evelyn Hope*.”

The big man stiffened and stared.

“Hades!” he burst out. “My passengers!”

CHAPTER II

WHEN CIPRIANO SMILES

THERE was an unpleasant pause after the big man's explosion. Bevis Probyn standing quietly, watching with his calm, shrewd eyes, knew acute anxiety. This certainly was the most inauspicious way to enter upon a matter of life or death.

It was obvious that the big man viewed them and the prospect of carrying them on his schooner with distaste. It was just as obvious that his attitude was resented. Jennifer Daun had stiffened into offended coldness—naturally; no man had ever dared to talk like this to her before. Paul Glen, always touchy but particularly so where Jennifer was concerned, was scowling his readiness to intervene as a strong man should if this low fellow showed any more rudeness. Only Liliás the sleek seemed to be enjoying the situation. But then that was her rôle in life, she obtained infinite satisfaction from such human antagonisms.

Jennifer said coldly: "You are Captain Sondes?"

"I am Martin Sondes," said the other evenly.

"O Diabo Martino—Martin the Devil," murmured Liliás, but no one paid attention to her.

"I am Jennifer Daun."

"I gathered it," said Martin Sondes without friend-

The Brute

liness. "And you have chartered my ship, I know that too." His brows narrowed. "But I didn't know my Rio agent was a fool."

"Look here—" began the furious Paul Glen.

"And why should your Rio agent be a fool, Captain?" asked Bevis quickly, quietly.

"He seems to have been bemused into imagining you needed me and my schooner for something important—in fact, for something dangerous."

"And you don't think that's true?" broke in Jennifer, passionate under his contempt.

He looked at her, at her slim, delicate beauty, at the Rue de la Paix perfection of her turn-out, the general luxuriousness of the whole party.

"How can I?" he asked curtly.

Jennifer's bright eyes sparkled angrily: "You must accept the facts despite our appearances, Captain," her voice said icily. "It may console you to know that we too were misled by your Rio agent."

"As—how?"

"He told us you were a gentleman."

The big man did not even redden. His eyes met hers level: "A romantic illusion on his part. Pedigrees don't survive on this coast."

"Nor common good manners, either," snapped Paul Glen, suddenly boiling over. "It's about time you remembered you were talking to someone rather different from your deck hands."

Martin Sondes turned to Paul Glen with massive imperturbability. "Spoiling for a row?" he said

When Cipriano Smiles

evenly. "You won't find me unaccommodating. Only—what's your station in this gala party?"

"You insolent—" began Paul, but Jennifer said "Paul" sharply, and Paul, remembering that he was a pure knight *sans reproche* of all the best London drawing-rooms, stood back.

Bevis Probyn said crisply: "Captain Sondes, you are behaving in a very strange manner. Your reception is unwarrantable, you seem to resent our presence."

"Yes, I resent your presence," said Martin Sondes emphatically. "I am warned by my agent that I am chartered for a venture of great gravity, even of risk. I am told that I have been specially selected because I am the only man to tackle that risk. I prepare for just that sort of undertaking. And—well, you turn up. That's the reason of my resentment, I don't like being fooled."

"Did it seem foolery when you rescued us from that rather ugly situation just now?"

"Do sensible people parade round with two boxes of gold sterling to tempt thieving dago ruffians?"

"They do if there is no other way to carry a large sum that may be needed instantly in circumstances or places where they may not be able to or *must not* go near a bank."

Martin Sondes stared at the bland little man for a moment. "That's logical," he said, in that unexpectedly well-bred voice of his. "At the same time do sensible people allow the world to know that they carry gold in their baggage?"

The Brute

"Sometimes they can't help themselves," smiled Bevis. "We didn't want that secret to get out."

"But it did—how?"

"We had to bribe heavily the ruffian who owned that tender to get off from the liner at all."

"I guess you did. Pascobas doesn't risk his filthy skin for nothing. But I see, that made talk."

"It did. His men talked with the dagos on the liner—up the side of the ship, you know, as they were slinging us and our baggage over in the basket. The fact that we had something valuable in the liner's strong-room must have been passed down to Pascobas's men. Our anxiety about these two boxes told them of their value."

"I wonder Pascobas didn't have a shot at those boxes himself."

"He did," said Bevis. "He tried to make us believe the harbour entrance was too dangerous in this sea. He wanted to put us ashore lower down the bay."

"In virgin jungle where robbing you would have been simple," said Martin Sondes. "You stopped that game?"

"Paul—Paul Glen here, shoved his pistol against Pascobas's waist-line. He became a miracle of navigation immediately and got us inside the harbour."

"Good for Paul Glen," said Martin Sondes, favouring the young man with a steady glance that made him furious. How dare this brute condescend to him. But Martin Sondes was no longer thinking

When Cipriano Smiles

about him. His quick eyes swept over them again, swept over their baggage.

"It's a mess," he said curtly, "but we've got to make the best of it."

He turned his face towards a group of men now gathered in one of the doorways of the big shed. He was obviously going to give an order to those men, but before he did so, he stared at a tall thin man who seemed to be talking persuasively to some of the others. His eyes were fixed on this man for a moment, then he gave a short laugh. "Yes," he said, "and the quicker we make the best of it the better."

He barked a short order that made the men at the doorway jump to attention. Some of them came forward to the baggage.

Jennifer as cold, as lovely as an affronted princess, intervened.

"One moment, Captain Sondes," she said icily. "If these men are coming to take our baggage to your ship you can countermand the order. We don't go on your ship."

Martin Sondes turned on her, there was no irritation on his rugged face, indeed there was a flicker of amusement about his strong lips.

"I fear you haven't any choice, Miss Daun," he said.

"We shall see," she said coldly. "Bevis, stop those men handling our luggage."

"Who will handle it?" asked Martin Sondes. "The porters who tried to rob you just now?"

The Brute

"There are probably some honest men in Saluce," said Jennifer coldly.

"It is possible," said Martin Sondes coolly. "But I fear two boxes of gold form too great an obstacle to simple virtue."

"We will risk that," said the beautiful girl haughtily.

"And where do you intend to go?" asked the Captain.

"There are hotels," said Jennifer.

"My dear Jennifer," cried Bevis Probyn, who knew Latin-America; "you really don't appreciate the danger, in the circumstances, of going to a hotel in a place like this."

"I prefer the danger," said the girl obstinately.

"By dawn tomorrow your throat will be cut," said Martin Sondes so casually that all started with horror.

Paul Glen snapped an exclamation of angry disgust at the fellow's brutality, but Liliás laughed softly, and Bevis recognised why she laughed. Jennifer under the crude brutality of that remark had gasped and lost all her haughtiness. Martin Sondes, rough, violent fellow that he was, seemed to have realised exactly what attitude would drive sense into a headstrong girl.

"Such attempts to frighten me—" Jennifer began in a shaking voice.

"Do frighten you, Miss Daun," said Martin Sondes incisively. "You are no fool, you must recognize what I say is true. I am, as you think, a rough fellow,

When Cipriano Smiles

a coarse fellow, a brutal fellow, but just because of that you know that if my words are painful they are at least plain fact. You are in a dangerous place, Miss Daun, under dangerous conditions. I tell you plainly that in this den of brigands and murderers your life will not be worth a moment's purchase if you sleep off my ship."

"You have made sleeping on your ship impossible," said Jennifer, but not quite so decisively as before.

Martin Sondes looked at her for a full half minute then he said quietly:

"I am sorry I spoke like a fool about your business, Miss Daun. I see it must be of real gravity to have brought a woman like you all the way from home to a place like this."

Lilias Seyler smiled. "Admirable and splendid brute," she thought. "So blunt and yet big enough to make a complete *amende*."

Jennifer, perhaps, felt this too, but she remained silent. Martin Sondes continued evenly:

"There will be danger if you stay on land. What else can you do? You are cut off from the world, for the mail-boat will not return for three weeks. By that time you will be robbed and dead and buried. That may sound fantastic, but, believe me, I *know*."

"There are other ships," said Jennifer in a low voice.

"There are," said Martin Sondes with the shadow of a smile on his lips, fine lips as both Lilias and Jennifer appreciated. "Other ships and other captains. You will find them charming, more charming

The Brute

than my uncouth self. They will take you to sea with an almost noble courtesy, rob you at leisure and drop your bodies overboard—all with the same perfect grace of manner. It is one of the characteristics of this land that even the commonest murderer has the social charm of a Spanish grandee.”

He paused, looked round on them all coolly, firmly.

“I haven’t any manners as you see. We don’t hit it off, that’s obvious. At the same time you don’t hire a captain for his social qualities. Particularly you don’t hire a man like me for parlour tricks. You’ve got some dangerous job for me—in spite of appearances. I’m used to dangerous jobs. I’ll do it.”

He was not defiant or boastful, he was merely stating facts. In Bevis Probyn’s mind the suspicion that they were dealing with a quite remarkable man became a certainty. He was glad. Jennifer, on the other hand, was trying to suppress exactly the same feeling. Of a staunch, strong nature herself she recognized such qualities in others. . . . If only this man had not been so downright.

“But you have no desire for our company,” she said, giving him a chance to win his way back into her good graces. He seemed to see it. The smile was on his lips again. But he answered:

“A trading captain has no personal feelings, Miss Daun. If he contracts to do a certain piece of work, he does it—without prejudice.”

“Oh,” she cried, her eyes blazing, “if that is how you feel why trouble to take us to your ship?”

When Cipriano Smiles

“Oh, I still have an instinct to save people of my own race from being murdered by dagos.”

The girl made a gesture of disgust and disagreement.

“You don’t believe it,” he went on quietly. He turned and nodded towards the tall thin man who had talked so earnestly with the others at the door of the shed. “Do you see that man, Miss Daun, the one who was talking to my hands? He is Cipriano Bravo, the cruellest, most ruthless and most accomplished cut-throat on this seaboard. His unerring nose for loot has smelt out those boxes of money. He is here to get them, and to knife all of you in the process if needs be.”

They all stared at the tall thin man. Under the cold, fierce glare of Martin Sondes the cadaverous Latin-American turned to them a face long, extremely lean and of an almost unearthly æsthetic beauty. He might have been some saintly monk who had refined and disciplined his flesh until his features had taken on a noble and saintly austerity.

He returned their gaze, deliberately examining face after face of those about the captain until his big, soulful eyes looked into those of Martin Sondes again. Then a mocking light came into those eyes, and with the grace of a nobleman he lifted his big straw hat from the high, narrow but splendid forehead. Smiling, he bowed low before walking away.

And as he smiled all there save Martin Sondes shuddered. The smile had transformed the face. In

The Brute

that moment the saint had vanished and one of the blackest and vilest of earthly devils was revealed.

“When Cipriano smiles, sleep with your gun in your hand! That’s a local proverb, Miss Daun,” said Martin Sondes quietly. “I think it is high time we went to my ship.”

CHAPTER III

EVEN THE BEAST HAS BEAUTIES

THERE was nothing uncouth about Martin Sondes's schooner, *Evelyn Hope*.

She was neat, swift and shining; she obviously had the sailing qualities of a yacht. To these capacities was added the power of a good auxiliary gasoline motor.

It was enheartening to notice that among the men on the deck there were several American and British sailors, though, for all that, the number of flimsily clad South Americans, half-castes and even negroes predominated. Jennifer's party had begun to feel uneasy of anything South American, and, it seemed, Martin Sondes's mate shared that feeling.

He was a long, whipcordy American youth, and he came to the captain as they were about to go down to the cabins.

"There's a lot of fresh talk among our dagos about millions in gold being aboard, sir," he said. "The sound of it isn't too healthy."

"It won't be healthy until we clear, Lincoln," said Martin evenly. "We have two boxes of gold aboard. You'll have to keep things keyed up. Pascobas and Cipriano Bravo are after that gold."

"Why not clear now?" asked Paul Glen.

The Brute

“In this sea?” said the mate with the dispassionate accent of a man talking to a fool.

“Not yet,” said Martin Sondes, casting his eye over sky and sea. “But take it from me we’ll stay no longer than we can help.”

The living quarters that Martin Sondes introduced them to, had the charm of the unexpected. They had looked forward to the cramped and stuffy quarters of a small coastal trader, they found instead the cosy apartment of a highly cultured young man about town.

It was not merely that the whole of the stern was given over to a bright, cheery saloon of broad cushioned seats and chintz-covered chairs; there was a general air of refinement and good taste everywhere.

There were, for instance, some beautiful coloured reproductions of classic pictures let into the panneling of the cabin walls—a Pisanello, a Jan van Eyck, a Maluse, copies of Rembrandt, Metsu and Giorgione.

Low bookshelves were crammed with a catholicity of volumes, bewildering in range, but evidence of a pretty broad scope in reading; it extended from the Greek classics in the original to French, English and American novelists; Trollope and Mrs. Wharton, Zola and P. G. Wodehouse, Brett Young, Frank and Charles Norris, Wells and Bennett, Zona Gale, O. Henry, and so on.

Lilias Seyler stopped before those books, gasped, and laughed her soft, slurring laugh.

“You have all the attractions of the unexpected,

Even the Beast Has Beauties

captain," she said in her bold way. "The buccaneer on deck and the fireside epicure below." Her eyes as she spoke were as bold as her words.

"Even barbarians read a little," he said coolly.

"A little, but not a lot. And not such books. The dear barbarian captain of the mail-boat read only *Sailing Directions* and a big, sinister volume called *Why Employ a Doctor? Have You Mumps? Look Inside.*"

"I have something like that, too," said Martin Sondes, "but I haven't that other barbarian's courage. Merely for me to read about mumps gives me all the symptoms."

"So you take refuge in Plato instead?"

"Or G. K. Chesterton," he said with a grim smile. "Either are better than a chapter on adenoids with immediate internal reactions."

"I feel we're going to have an attractive trip," said Liliias. "I shall watch you killing your men regularly on deck, and then be filled with wonder when you come down and steep yourself in Lytton Strachey."

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed," said Martin Sondes, steady-eyed and quiet. "I rarely kill my men more than once. It undermines the morale and hampers the working of the ship."

Even Jennifer laughed at that, and Liliias, by no means put out, went on: "A tongue in your head, too. You are full of attractions."

"Even the beast had his beauties," said Martin shortly, and signalled his Japanese steward forward.

But he had given Liliias an opening which she

The Brute

could not resist: "The Beast now," she murmured. "Didn't the Beast marry the Beauty in the end?" Her eyes, as she spoke, flitted so significantly from the man to Jennifer, that the girl's eyes flashed real anger. Martin Sondes showed nothing, merely stood calmly back while Liliás with her pantherine grace swung by him to her cabin.

Their cabins were cool and neat, chintz fitted and comfortable. At the end of the alleyway was a wonderful bathroom fitted with all those sprays that mitigate the lot of a traveller forced to journey in tropic weather.

"This barbarian is not averse to luxury," Liliás said, drifting into Jennifer's cabin. "He's a superb riddle, don't you think? A man of breeding and yet a journeyman brute. Jennifer, my dear, I really do believe I'm going to stop being chaperon and become an interested actor on this part of our trip."

"He's an extraordinary creature," Jennifer agreed. "But without doubt quite the rudest and most unpleasant man I've ever met."

"That's where he is so interesting," said Liliás, curling on Jennifer's bed like a great cat, and showing the sinuous and superb lines of her full figure.

"Lacerating rather than interesting—to have to clash with such a creature, is—is mortifying."

"It's his power," said Liliás speculatively. "I don't know when I've ever met a man with such terrific natural force. It comes out at you, dominates."

"Force!" cried Jennifer scornfully. "A tiger has terrific natural force, too, but one doesn't want to live

Even the Beast Has Beauties

with it. It's the brute in him you feel, that's all."

"I wonder. Do you think a brute could have fitted up that cabin or chosen those books and pictures?"

"Do you think anyone but a brute could have talked to us as that man did?"

"One might call that just plain speaking without frills."

"So plain as to be ugly."

"I suspect the plain truth *is* ugly in this part of the world. Cutting throats and the evading of cut-throats robs human intercourse of its drawing-room nuances. I see this lovely, ruthless skipper of ours—speaking merely as an onlooker, my dear—as a man who has no use for anything but plain, hard facts and grim truth. He has whittled away all the fripperies of life until only the stark verities remain. Not a nice man to meet in a drawing-room, but rather a useful person to have about one in a place like this and an adventure like yours, Jennifer."

"I'll concede that," admitted Jennifer. "The Rio agent said he was the one man on the coast to carry through a desperate and dangerous job. He certainly acts as though he was. But that doesn't prevent me loathing him at first sight."

Lilias leaned back, her sleepy, alluring eyes regarding the other analytically: "That, I fancy, is rather a dangerous state of mind. It indicated that you may come to love him at last."

Jennifer swung on her companion with almost too ready an indignation: "Are you imagining I should ever be attracted by a creature like that?"

The Brute

“It would be annoying if you were,” said Lilias, uncurling herself, and preparing to leave the cabin with Jennifer, “because I intend to make love to him myself.”

Martin Sondes was obviously not popular with another member of the party—Paul Glen. Topi who served tea with the silent and rather uncanny perfection of the East told them that the captain would not join them.

“He probably needs time to recover from the shock of having a party of society idlers launched out of the blue on to his purely utilitarian ship,” said Lilias.

“Oh, well, a peppery beggar like that is best left alone,” said Paul, with that supremely worldly-wise air begot of the fact that he had donned a fresh suit of perfectly tailored duck. . . . Martin Sondes was anything but perfectly tailored.

“Peppery and with a punch,” smiled Lilias lazily. “I rather expected you were going to be the means of favouring us with a spectacle of both back in that shed. It would have been thrilling. You box rather better than a bit, don’t you, Paul?”

“You talk the most unmitigated rot at times,” said Paul huffily. “One doesn’t scrap like a navy every time one has a difference of opinion, you know.”

“I doubt whether Martin Sondes suffers from such inhibitions,” said Lilias with her deep and tantalizing drawl. “But we shall see. A man of your particular manner, Paul, is bound to upset him sooner or later.”

Paul stiffened his massive shoulders truculently, and Bevis interposed smoothly: “There is nothing

Even the Beast Has Beauties

to be gained by anticipating friction. We have enough trouble ahead of us as it is. Personally I am grateful that we have the support of such a man for the rescue of Ronald Buckingham. I am greatly impressed with Martin Sondes's capacity."

"I am, too," said Jennifer evenly and to the great surprise of Paul, who saw her only as a lovely, slim, fastidious and wayward girl, instinctively repulsed by brutality. But Bevis smiled. He knew that under Jennifer's quick, ardent and even headstrong temper there was a great deal of intelligence and common sense. She went on: "He may jar on us, but there is no doubt he has the qualities of courage, daring, resource and even ruthlessness necessary for the success of our plan. I feel more than ever certain that we shall rescue Ralph."

Lilias gave a little laugh. "Bevis calls him Ronald, you call him Ralph. . . . I think a definite ruling on what name we are to use would be wise."

Jennifer did not answer, but looked at Bevis. "Oh, I think we had better stick to Ronald Buckingham," he said. "It is the name he is known by and imprisoned under. It is obvious, too, that he chose to hide his real name for very good reasons."

"To hide from that scoundrel who is hounding him down, of course," said Paul.

"I agree," said Jennifer. "We must call him Ronald Buckingham, always; not Ralph Felton. As you have said before, news travels in an uncanny way in this part of the world, and the mention of the right

The Brute

name may put that beast on Ralph's track and so undo the work we are here to do."

"It might even give that cad a warning that would enable him to escape from us. That would spoil things," said Paul.

"It would," said Jennifer with a note of passion creeping into her voice. "We must always keep in mind that our object is twofold, the rescue of Ralph and the punishment of the brute who hounded Ralph so cruelly." She paused, staring out of the windows astern. "And Captain Sondes seems to me the sort of man to help there, also. He can help us search out and deal with that man when Ralph has told us his name."

"Surely a brute like Sondes will be on the side of brutes," said Paul loftily.

"No," said Jennifer to the astonishment of all. "Captain Sondes is repellent, but I feel he is square. He is the sort of man to hate wrongdoing and love justice."

CHAPTER IV

CUSTOMS OF THE COUNTRY

THEY were still talking when an uproar on the deck brought them to their feet.

Quite abruptly there had come shouting, stamping, the sound of fighting and then a scream.

“Don’t go up,” Bevis cried as they made for the companionway. “We’ll only add to the trouble.”

No one paid the slightest attention to him. Even the girls ran up into the crude, raw and magnificent glare of the tropic sunset. Dazzled for a moment they soon saw that ugly work was going on.

On the main deck forward a knot of men were struggling vigorously. It seemed as though some were trying to get to the side of the ship while others were fighting them back. Arms whirled, a man came stumbling and sagging out of the mob, tripped and fell all a-sprawl to the planking. A knife arm flashed, an arm hooked and struck, there was another scream. The mass swayed back from the ship’s side. They looked on amazed at this exhibition of savage and primitive passion, and suddenly Bevis’s voice came smooth but deadly:

“Senhor, drop that gun! At once or I shoot!”

Bevis was stiff, alert, his pistol ready. In line with that pistol, just below the break of the poop, a tall figure on the quay was leaning across the ship’s

The Brute

rail. One lean, monkey-spider arm was pointing a pistol at another figure at the foot of the accommodation ladder across the deck—that other figure was Martin Sondes. He was staring ahead without any sign of emotion at the man who threatened from the quay. That man was the saint-faced desperado, Cipriano Bravo.

All this they saw in a flash, and in a flash Martin Sondes had dropped flat to the deck. Cipriano fired at the same instant, and the explosion of Bevis's pistol seemed to fuse into that shot. Whether Bevis had saved the captain, or whether he was dead they could not at first say.

Then—it seemed an age after—Cipriano's fingers went limp and his weapon fell down on the quay. He stood stiffly looking at his wrist where blood was showing. He dropped his arm with a shrug, and his wolfish grin effaced the sheer beauty of his face as he turned to Bevis.

“Senhor is to be congratulated,” he said, with the courtesy of an aristocrat. “Senhor is more ready to adopt the customs of the country than I imagined. The wound is a mere scratch, let me hasten to assure you, but the decision of your action warns me against risking my body further. I will remember your capacities with respect, Senhor. Until heaven sends the next meeting. . . .”

His hat was off in a superb flourish, and, as though he had never felt the slightest interest in the *Evelyn Hope*, he calmly walked away.

Customs of the Country

Only Bevis watched him go. The others had more exciting things to see.

Martin Sondes, wasting no thought on his narrow escape from death, was up and moving along the deck. He seemed to travel the whole length in three great strides. He went straight into the mob of struggling men, his hands pumping hard.

A man seemed to lift right out of the crowd from the swinging up-rush of his right. The left smashed and a nigger collapsed into the scuppers. The mass swallowed him like a wave burying a swimmer, but up came his great shoulders bursting and thrusting through the mass, and men toppling this way and that from him as before. Jennifer gave a little cry. A man was crouching, waiting on Sondes's movements, and a knife was in his hand. A space cleared like magic about the captain—and the knife—the hand swung. Sondes had seen. He dived straight on to the knife arm, crippled its movement; his great right fist dug. The assassin took the punch on the solar plexus, caved and fell in on himself.

Martin tossed the fellow aside, drove at the other men. There were ten or twelve of them, niggers and dagos and all had knives now. Ranged against them with Martin Sondes was the boy-mate and a few white hands. Paul noted the odds, leapt down from the poop and at a run joined the captain. Paul was a useful size and weight, and though he hit almost exclusively in a stiff, straight-left style, when that straight left got home there was a pretty pack of weight behind it. He knocked one fellow clean on

The Brute

to the cargo hatch, and cross-hit another with such force that he crawled away to think it over.

Martin shouted: "Drive 'em towards the fo'c'sle. Don't let any jump the ship."

Paul on the wing of the line swung inwards, and the attackers, hemming the crew, drove them in a narrowing circle towards the open fo'c'sle hatch. "Now!" yelled Martin, and he and his men flung themselves compactly on the mass of dagos and spun them piling up and kicking on to the floor of the fo'c'sle. The hatch was slammed, the roof-slide shut home, the mate bolted down all tight.

"What was it all about?" Bevis asked, coming down to the group as it stood panting, and—the mate at least—tying up knife wounds.

"Cipriano's first move," said Martin shortly. His eyes were staring across the harbour to where the sea showed angry and dangerous beyond. "Get a kedge out, Lincoln," he said to the mate. "We'll put salt water round that scum anyhow for the night."

He turned again to Bevis: "Do you follow the plan? Cipriano and his jackals—the big cur with the knife I outted was one of them—came and talked honey to my crew. Intimated that their chance of living to a ripe old age would be considerably lessened if they stayed on this ship. So they decided to leave in a body."

"Phew," Paul exclaimed, "they must be pretty scared of Cipriano."

"They are. You see, they know him."

"He wanted to delay sailing, of course," said Bevis.

Customs of the Country

“What else?” asked Martin curtly. “Even an artist of Cipriano’s efficiency prefers to rob at leisure. Ready with that kedge, Lincoln? Jim, Dick, stand by to cast off.” He turned to Paul and Bevis. “I’ll ask you to heave that big fellow with the knife, and that little snaky rat over there on the quay. Then you can take a trick at the windlass.”

Paul wanted to say that he was a passenger, not a deck-hand, but Bevis answered too quickly: “Certainly, Captain, I take it you are anchoring in the middle of the harbour to keep our friend Cipriano at arm’s length?”

“No, to keep my crew aboard. I can’t sail out in this sea, but when I do I want to have enough hands aboard to work the ship.”

A hail came from the centre of the harbour, where the mate, in a small boat, had carried the kedge anchor. Martin signalled and the mate dropped the kedge. The two white sailors cast off from the quay, and Paul at the windlass spent the most heating, exasperating and hand-blistering hour of his existence. It was true that the other hands, the mate and even the captain worked as hard as he, but he was furiously annoyed at having been treated as just an ordinary person—and more, at having a clean and perfect suit of flannels ruined with dirt and grease.

CHAPTER V

THE DOUBLE QUEST

MARTIN SONDES said as soon as the Japanese steward had vanished with the dinner plates:

“We sail at daylight. We had better have our route now, Miss Daun.”

Under the oil lamps swinging gently in gimbals Martin Sondes’s face looked more square, unyielding and rugged than ever. The strength of his personality had dominated the dinner-table, and yet it had been impressive rather than intimidating. He had talked easily and with the mastery of any subject that had come up, when necessary; only, on the whole, he had not found it necessary to talk. The effect had been reassuring, and Jennifer was able to answer quite easily:

“Yes, it is time to talk business. The port we want you to take us to, Captain, is Fogasta.”

“Yes.”

“No difficulty about that?”

“None at all.”

“But you do understand that there may be danger when we reach Fogasta, grave danger?”

“The Rio agent made that a particular point. I am not unaccustomed to it, Miss Daun.”

“That hadn’t to be told,” said Jennifer with a half

The Double Quest

smile. "You have already lived up to much the Rio agent told us of you."

"I hope he also told you of certain limitations," said Martin Sondes quietly.

"Such as?"

"I do not touch anything questionable, mean, or frankly dishonest."

Jennifer caught her breath sharply at that, her fine brow wrinkled anxiously. She said slowly:

"The first thing we want you to do, Captain, is to rescue a man from prison."

Martin Sondes examined her silently then: "A man imprisoned in Fogasta?"

"We think so. When he wrote last he was in the Morro there. It will not be easy, we understand. . . ."

Martin Sondes brushed that aside. With eyes fixed level on hers he asked almost harshly: "What was the crime?"

"Crime!" she answered hotly. "It was an unjust imprisonment."

"More than likely!" Martin's grim smile came faintly. "Justice is not a distinguishing quality of the Republic of Fogasta. Still, there *are* cases of real guilt."

"But he is a man of our own blood," she protested.

Martin Sondes's face darkened with a curious, black passion: "That sort can be the worst," he said. Jennifer looked at him startled and angry.

"If what I hear is true, Captain Sondes, these

The Brute

Latin-American prisons are unspeakable places. They mean death for a white man."

"Quite true," Martin agreed. "They are not fit even for a mongrel British dog, Miss Daun."

"And yet you hesitate about rescuing a Britisher from one?"

"Not hesitating, Miss Daun, merely wanting to know whether I can do it with clean hands." His eyes grew hard. "I know one or two Britishers, Miss Daun, for whom even a dago prison with all its rottenness is too good."

Jennifer stared, offended: "You say that about your own race?"

"Miss Daun," he said firmly, "I don't help any man of any race to escape even from a South American jail if he is in there for a crime I abhor."

"Captain Sondes," said Jennifer, "I am speaking of my half-brother."

Martin Sondes shrugged his great shoulders. That neither prevented a man being vile, nor altered his own viewpoint, that shrug said. It did not increase Jennifer's friendliness. It was Bevis who said quietly:

"Aren't we wandering from the point? Your limitations do not affect this case. The crime this young man committed was political."

"That," said Martin Sondes, "is quite another matter. Will you give me details?"

"Are we to be put into the dock and cross-examined?" cried Jennifer.

"We are asking Captain Sondes to run considerable

The Double Quest

risk," said Bevis quietly. "It is only fair that he should know exactly why." He turned to Martin. "The details we have are few enough. It appears that Miss Daun's half-brother having obtained, legally, a mining concession in Fogasta, agreed with the rest of the community in which he lived to resist a new mine tax. It was, they all agreed, an unlawful tax, since it specifically broke the terms of the concession they had obtained from the government. In resisting this exaction, this young man was captured. He was tried by a travesty of a court and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment. That, we are told, means death for one of his kind."

"It does," Sondes said evenly, "if we can't get him out."

"Ah!" cried Jennifer in a great gasp of relief. "You will get him out?"

"I will try," said Sondes. His eyes rested on Jennifer and his smile came. "That sort of thing is not held to be a crime in these places. It is clean and natural beside some of the things our bad-hats do out here. I'll willingly do my best to get this man Daun out of his trouble."

"Daun is not his name," said Jennifer. "He is my half-brother, you know. . . . His name is Ronald Buckingham."

"Ronald Buckingham," Martin Sondes said thoughtfully, "that is a new name to me."

"I don't suppose you know all the Britishers on this seaboard," said Paul a little huffily.

"Most of them," said Martin, "either personally or

The Brute

by repute. Our colony is not so big that we do not know of each other, if only distantly."

"That should be of use in the second matter for which we want your help," said Jennifer. "But first about the rescue. My brother managed to get a letter smuggled out of prison to us. He told us of the horror of his position, but also that his release could be managed if we were prepared to bribe heavily. He seemed certain of it. . . ."

"He had right with him," said Sondes. "Bribes can do anything on this continent. You can do much if those boxes of gold mean anything."

"We have seven thousand pounds in English gold."

"A lot of money. If Cipriano has smelt out all that we shall have a lively time between here and Fogasta." He frowned a little, and said, half musing, "A wealthy young woman. . . ."

Jennifer flushed, and said with a touch of loftiness: "My father—not Ronald's, his was a poor man—left me a great deal of money. I am willing to spend anything to save my half-brother from the horrors he describes."

"I was merely thinking that we shall have to be careful about you, Miss Daun. You are highly valuable—for ransom, and I should say that our friend Cipriano, and the skipper of the tender, Pascobas, must appreciate the fact."

"My brother is more important," said Jennifer with her chin high.

"No doubt," said Sondes. "At the same time you count. I think it will be safest if you wait in some

The Double Quest

town, say Belem, while I carry out this business.”

“I come with you, Captain Sondes,” said Jennifer firmly.

“You don’t realize the dangers,” he said curtly. “They are real. They include death; they include disease and perils at sea, discomfort, roughness, privations to which a girl of your upbringing and life is a complete stranger.”

“Captain Sondes,” said Jennifer firmly, “I have made up my mind to take part—personally—in the rescue of my brother.”

“A girl of your breeding—and beauty—has no right to travel in this barbarous country amid men who are as barbarous as the country,” he said grimly.

“I accept all risks,” she answered coldly.

Lilias’s soft laugh came: “Also the captain feels that foolish women will be terribly in the way,” she said.

“You will,” said Martin calmly.

“Nevertheless I come,” said Jennifer.

“And I wouldn’t miss it for worlds,” said the purring voice of Lilias, “quite apart from the fact that Jennifer must have a chaperon.”

Martin Sondes looked squarely at Jennifer for a moment. Then he said quietly: “What is the other thing you want me to do?”

Jennifer gave a little gasp of utter relief. She had felt that she had been pitting her will against the power of this man, and though she had spoken bravely she had not been certain of victory. She had to pause for a moment before she could take up

The Brute

the threads, then she said: "The second thing is to hunt down and punish a cur."

Even the calm Martin Sondes was surprised at that. He said after a moment: "Just what does that mean, Miss Daun?"

"You said just now," went on Jennifer, "that there were certain Britishers out here who shamed our race by the vileness of their lives. The man I want to find, mean to find, is just such a man. A brute, Captain Sondes, whom I mean to bring to justice."

"His name?" asked Martin Sondes, with a touch of eagerness.

"We do not know his name—yet," said Jennifer. "But when we rescue my brother we will know it."

"His villainies are connected with your brother?"

"My brother was his victim."

"Go on, Miss Daun," said Martin evenly.

"If I do not know his name," said Jennifer with growing passion, "I know what he has done to my brother, Captain Sondes. From the moment Ronald landed in South America he has been dogged by this brute's enmity. All that my brother has suffered, all the plans that have gone astray are due to this man. He is a bully, a brute, one of the most notorious scoundrels of this seaboard, my brother declares."

"And yet your brother did not mention his name?"

"Why should he? It would convey nothing to us at home. But his letters showed plainly how unbearable this man made existence here. Captain Sondes, for no reason at all, save that that man was

The Double Quest

vile, Ronald went in constant fear of death at that man's hand. Time and time again he had to fly from a town just as he was beginning to make headway, because of the pursuit of this man. My brother lost trading posts, he lost the little money he had, he lost peace of mind and health—he was hunted and ruined. Oh, I can't make you understand what the poor boy went through."

"Go on," said Sondes. "I understand better than you imagine. . . . All that sort of thing is quite in keeping with that unpleasant type I spoke of just now. How did your brother earn this man's enmity?"

"He exposed him in some dishonesty, he said. The man never forgave him. He swore to get even with him, hunt him into his grave. And he has done his best. In one of his last letters my brother declared he had been brought to physical and moral as well as financial ruin by what he had been forced to go through."

"Why didn't your brother stand up to him?" asked Martin harshly.

"My brother is not physically strong; we are not all made alike," she said meeting his eyes level.

"Even refined breeding can face a brute," said Martin, with a grim smile. "This seaboard is no place for weaklings, Miss Daun."

"Is that a reason why brutes like this man should go free, Captain Sondes?" she cried, a high spot of anger on each cheek.

"It isn't," he answered tersely. "And I will tell

The Brute

you something, Miss Daun. Ever since I have been out here I have been fighting the type of scoundrel you describe. Oh, they exist to our shame, and I know them and hate them—and I fight them. They have caused all the enmity and suspicion that exists today between races who should live together amicably. One cur of this type will wipe out in a day all the good work honest and decent men do in twenty years. I know! There is a tribe of Indians on a lonely Brazilian creek who had treated me fairly and traded honourably with me for years. A black-hearted scoundrel I had befriended took shelter from justice among them. They treated him with the splendid and simple hospitality of their natures because he was my friend—*my friend!* He did abominations to them, stole, killed—worse. And then bolted. And when I went among them again they shot at me. They could no longer trust one of my colour, they were the enemies of my colour. And could I blame them? I couldn't. . . . But the man who killed that goodwill—why, by Heaven if I ever catch him there'll be no mercy."

As he spoke his figure filled, and his face lit up with a terrible light of vengeance. They stared at him breathless, awed. They seemed puny beside him, the petty people of an artificial civilization. While he looked—he looked big, elementally and tremendously big, a splendid figure of fineness, straight-dealing—justness. Rude and plain-spoken to brutality he might be, but it arose from a force that was superior to little meannesses and petty

The Double Quest

crooked things. He was big—very big, with a mind as big.

For a moment he stared with clear and unyielding eyes over the wine-dark sea that heaved beneath the ports astern, then he pulled himself together, and said with his grim smile:

“You’ll see I’m what they call, at home, a crank. I’ve got a fixed idea that the world is spoilt for decent people—the majority—by the few bad-hats. And my nature being what it is, it does not seem quite good enough for me to sit still while these bad-hats are ruining my good world. I don’t think good ought to be merely passive. And I don’t practise it. So when I meet one of these gentlemen I go after him strongly and continuously. There is a fellow. . . . But that doesn’t matter. What does matter, Miss Daun, is that you don’t have to enlist me on your side. If you are out to punish a cur, I’m with you instinctively. We’ll catch that brute if we have to chase him from Cape Horn to Greenland and back again. And when we’ve caught him I guess we’ll make him pay in full.”

Jennifer, with eyes shining very brightly, stretched out her hand: “That’s a promise, Captain Sondes?” she cried softly.

“It’s a promise,” he said, and he took her hand.

“And my brother?”

“That’s a promise, too,” he laughed, and he was singularly boyish—boyish and charming. “We’ll have him out of jail if they’ve hidden him in the last of all the jungle towns of Fogasta. . . . Acci-

The Brute

dents and act of God not intervening, you understand—I'm only a human man."

"A little more, I think," said Jennifer, her face bright, and more exquisite, more alluring than Martin Sondes cared about. "I know now we are fortunate in having your help."

While turning in that night Martin Sondes wondered how far *he* was fortunate in having one so beautiful in his charge.

CHAPTER VI

MASTER

IT was after midnight when the noise of running feet on the deck woke Jennifer and her party.

Awakened in the dark hot silence of the tropic night the sense of alarm seemed to carry Jennifer away into panic for a moment. She could almost *feel* the rush of ruffians overhead, almost feel the saintly sinister presence of Cipriano in her cabin and the threat of his knife at her long, warm throat.

The panic cleared. After all it was not fighting she heard. There was no outcry, no scuffling, no shooting. Instead she heard the mate's voice calling from the deck, and the sibilant tones of Topi answering, then a knock at the captain's door, and the passage of Martin Sondes's quick, urgent and assured tread along the alleyway towards the deck.

She heard Bevis and Paul talking with that queer, thrilling distinctness of sounds in deep quietude. They went up to the deck. Quickly putting on a few garments she went up into the night too.

At first she saw nothing amiss. A tropic moon was turning to silver the heavy sweep of the seas. 'Across the harbour she saw the fret of palms and trees standing like delicate filigree against the milk-blue sky. Under the trees the square massive houses

The Brute

shone flat and flour-white, with here and there a window gleaming like fire opal.

From somewhere on land came the wailing lilt of a guitar, and, thinner and beyond, the barking of dog-monkeys in the jungle. All was peaceful, delicate, shining with beauty. What could be wrong?

She joined Bevis and Paul, standing at the break of the poop. They were leaning forward to where a group of men laboured on the deck.

“What is it?” she asked.

Paul stretched his hand pointing to the fo’c’sle head.

“That smoke,” he said, “fire!”

Quite suddenly she saw a wavering coil of smoke rising up and fanning out above the fo’c’sle; it drifted, now dark, now milk-coloured, from shadow to moonlight.

“Fire,” she whispered, frightened. “How?”

A voice came from beneath their feet. The boy-mate working unseen had heard them.

“It’s a trick,” he said, “but the real thing all right. Those durned greasers have fired the ship.”

They all went forward to where the men were working, uncoiling the hose, shipping the pump. A flurry of wind swept the length of the schooner. It beat the smoke down and back into the fo’c’sle. Immediately there uprose from that cramped space the animal clamour of frightened men.

“Can’t they get out?” cried Jennifer in horror.

“They’re not going to get out,” came the grim

Master

voice of Martin Sondes. "That pump ready, Lincoln?"

"Aye Aye! sir," came from the mate.

"Heavens," cried Paul Glen, "they'll be smoked to death like wasps in a nest."

"You can render first aid then," came the even voice of Martin Sondes. "Got that hose forward, Harry? Right! Dick. Mr. Glen get to the pump."

Again the overbearing brute was treating Paul like a deck-hand. "Look here," he growled, "I'm not. . . ."

"Not so much darned debating," snapped Martin Sondes with a cutting edge to his voice. "That's an order, jump to it."

Paul Glen's big chest swelled. It was about time he put this fellow in his place. Bevis Probyn said testily: "For Heaven's sake use your head, Paul. This is a matter of life and death."

"He wants me to notify my intentions in a polite letter a week in advance," Martin Sondes said curtly. He turned his back on the raging Paul and with a catlike jump reached the fo'c'sle head.

He reached a ventilator, swung it round, put his mouth to the bell, roared:

"Sons of pigs whose grandmothers were pigs—quiet. If you want to save your misbegotten lives listen."

The wild clamour in the fo'c'sle stilled as though by magic. The skipper's voice went on:

"You're locked tight in the fo'c'sle. You're going to remain locked in the fo'c'sle, sabe? So you'd bet-

The Brute

ter lose no time in saving your lives. You've fired my ship, you'll put it out—or burn."

There was a wild outcry of terror and rage. Screaming voices cried that they were already burning. Sondes's strong commands beat the uproar into silence once more.

"Yes, you will burn," he cried—"burn like rats in a trap. And you will go from it to the more painful roasting of hell. But you shall at least decide for yourselves."

There was the abrupt crash of a pistol in the fo'c'sle. A bullet tore through the planking on the *other* side of the ventilator, the side where Martin Sondes would have been if he had not swung the cowl round.

"When you have that man tied up," he roared, "I will talk with you again. Hurry, or you will be choked to death. I am shutting the ventilators. When he is tied up, sing out together."

Calmly, methodically, he slipped about the fo'c'sle head shutting all air vents, bottling the thick choking smoke into the narrow space of the men's quarters. From those quarters came another shot—but no bullet—the screams of a man, and the sounds of a wild fight. Sondes dropped imperturbably on to the main deck, stood there as the mate brought the head of the hose forward. He seemed absolutely unconcerned by the fact that his hands were being suffocated to death only a few feet from his own broad back.

Jennifer, her fine eyes blazing, could not stand this. It was brutality beyond endurance.

Master

“Captain Sondes!” she cried. “Captain Sondes!”

The skipper realized the presence of the girls for the first time. His frowning face was turned over his shoulder:

“Go aft, please,” he cried. “You are in the way here.”

In the way! Jennifer could have struck the fellow. She cried indignantly:

“Captain Sondes, you cannot do this barbarous thing. Killing—murdering your whole crew. It is infamous. I will not allow it.”

“Ready by that pump there?” shouted Sondes. “Get busy.”

From astern came the clank of the hand-pump and the hose fattened and gushed water.

“Captain Sondes, did you hear me?” cried the passionate Jennifer.

“Mr. Probyn,” Sondes snapped, “get these women aft. At once.”

He turned to face the fo’c’sle, where the clamour of fighting had died. Jennifer took three rapid steps forward, was before him, a superb, a lovely figure, the figure of a goddess of just anger in the white marble of the moonlight.

“How dare you!” she cried. “How dare you treat me like this! I have given you an order—”

“You don’t give orders on this ship, Miss Daun,” he said. “I do.”

“How dare you!” she cried again. “I will not have these men murdered.”

He looked at her steadily.

The Brute

“You prefer being murdered yourself?” he asked. “If that was all I’d do as you say. It isn’t all. There’s my mate, and my men, and me. We’re not going to be sacrificed for the ignorant whim of a girl. Please go aft, and don’t interfere, Miss Daun.”

There was a sudden shouting, a singing-out from the panic-stricken men in the fo’c’sle.

“You are a brute and a coward!” cried the angry girl. “I will not stand by and see those poor creatures suffocated like—like rats.”

He smiled grimly:

“Every moment you hold me here arguing Miss Daun,” he said, “you make their chance of escape less. You hear them singing out? That shows they’ve caved in and are willing to save themselves. But you’d rather keep me here arguing the thing out, eh?”

She stepped back, her face furious.

“Go to them, then,” she exclaimed passionately. “Don’t blame me for your callousness.”

“You can’t evade facts like that,” he said quite calmly, without moving. “You come and interrupt my work quite recklessly, because you are ignorant. You hold up my plans for saving those men and us, again because you do not know. Then you try to blame me.”

“Those men are waiting to be saved, Captain Sondes.”

“They will be when my order to you is obeyed.”

“Captain Sondes,” she cried, “you are deliberately playing with me in a matter of life and death.”

“Not playing with you,” he said grimly. “*Teaching*

Master

you. Making it plain to you that ignorant interference is a crime. The scum in there set fire to the ship in the hope of forcing us to land, in the hope of escaping to land; in the hope of holding up our sailing. You already know what that means. Robbery, death for all of us. I have made my plans to meet this situation for our safety, but you come down here—”

There was an outburst of almost hysterical yelling from the fo’c’sle. Jennifer shuddered. “That is enough, Captain Sondes,” she cried. “Do quickly what you had planned to do—that is all.”

“When you are on the poop aft, I begin,” he said evenly. “Not until then.”

Jennifer turned and swiftly went aft. Liliias, smiling softly, followed.

CHAPTER VII

PASCOBAS MANŒUVRES

NOT until the girls had mounted the ladder to the poop did Martin Sondes move. But when he did, his actions had an extraordinary swiftness and certitude.

He caught up the hose, now spitting water in a powerful jet, and with the ease of his tremendous strength dragged it to the fo'c'sle scuttle. He knocked the scuttle back. At once a dense volume of smoke arose, and the head and shoulders of a frantic nigger.

The nigger had a long knife in his hand, and was prepared to fight any man who barred his way. But he had not counted on the combative effects of a powerful stream of water. The jet from the hose caught him squarely, and knocked him head over heels back into the fo'c'sle. The hose followed him down.

Martin Sondes yelled through the scuttle:

“Put out your fire. No man comes on deck until it is got under. Fight for your own lives, you dogs.”

A throwing knife came singing past his ear, and by way of a test case a big dago heaved after it through the scuttle. No more than his face reached deck level. On that level Martin Sondes's fist took it with a cruel, digging blow, and the man dropped out of view like a stone. Those below, taking the lesson to heart, de-

Pascobas Manoeuvres

voted all their energies thereafter to saving their precious hides from their own fire.

It was as well. Those commanding the deck of the *Evelyn Hope* had other things to attend to.

The fire had been seen on shore—as the crew had hoped it would be. Saluce, so dead, so thickly, wickedly stagnant in the tropic heat, woke up. Shrill voices called amid the houses. Dark figures ran on the quayside.

Abruptly Sondes called out:

“Mr. Probyn, get that belaying-pin and come here. Stand there, over the scuttle; if anything shows bat it hard.”

“I will, without hesitation,” Probyn answered, smiling grimly. “What’s the trouble now, Sondes?”

“We’re going to get friendly help, dern it,” said the skipper grimly. His finger indicated a plume of smoke rising from a crazy smokestack. “Pascobas is hurrying to our rescue.”

“A pistol shot or two will scare *him*.”

“It will, if that snake, Cipriano, isn’t at his elbow. By the way, you’ve got a pistol yourself, Probyn?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve been in these waters, before, you know.”

“I’ve noted it,” said Sondes. “You’re a useful man to have about.”

“Paul Glen can be useful, too.”

“Not until he’s forgotten his drawing-room attitudes,” Sondes observed, not scornfully, but as one stating a fact. “He may learn, but his kind are usually too superior to learn.”

The Brute

“Your teaching is rather harsh.”

“It is. So are our surroundings. Here you are harsh, or you die. Mistakes are fatal; one slip, and nature—which is a wolf—or man—who is a hyena—gets you, especially on a job like ours. Here comes Pascobas.”

The crazy tugboat pushed nosing out from the wharf, kicking and staggering in the still dangerous swell. A great muddy trail of wood-smoke belched from her stack in a dingy scarf across the moonlit harbour. Martin Sondes watched the tender labouring towards him in complete silence. He had gone aft to the poop, where he stood revealed, a tremendous figure in the moonlight.

His massive silence was too much for the fat Pascobas on the bridge. It was he who in the end leaned over his tattered dogger and bawled:

“*Evelyn Hope*, ahoy! Senhor Captain, you need help?”

Sondes’s voice, even, but of a clear and penetrating pitch, called back:

“I do not!”

This was baffling for Pascobas. He hopped on one fat leg and then on another.

“But, senhor, you are on fire!”

“I do not need assistance, Pascobas.”

“But you have many people on board to save—your crew and your passengers.”

“I’ll signal if I want you. Good-night!”

Pascobas was at loss. He dodged back to his little chart-house. There was someone there he must con-

Pascobas Manoeuvres

sult. Bevis Probyn saw a long, thin, shadowy stick of a man. He already knew the outline of Cipriano far too well to make any mistake about that shadow. Pascobas hopped back.

“But we must rescue you, senhor!” he bleated. “The rules of the port authorities set down that we—”

Pascobas stopped short. Martin Sondes had deliberately drawn a pistol from his hip-pocket and was resting the muzzle on the rail.

“Senhor, it is the law!” cried Pascobas in a wheezy tone.

“You are getting too close,” Sondes answered. “Sheer away, there.”

He waited for an order from Pascobas; none came. The pistol flicked once, and the tug-skipper’s straw hat kicked upwards, spinning in the bright moonlight, a brilliant piece of shooting, and convincing. Pascobas rapped out an order.

But he didn’t turn and make for the quay. He swung his crazy vessel round and round the schooner, coming no closer for fear of that pistol. Sondes and Bevis watched him, the latter at least wondering what his game was. On the deck of the schooner the pump clanked unceasingly. It was breaking Glen’s back, but since the man Dick showed no sign of slackening, Paul’s pride held him to the exhausting task. From the fo’c’sle scuttle the cloud of smoke had dwindled, and now Probyn could hear the rush of water and also the voices of the imprisoned men talking less excitedly. Still the tender circled the

The Brute

schooner mysteriously, with the fat villain Pascobas and the snake-like murderer Cipriano aboard. They were probably only watching and hoping for a chance to attack, but Bevis could not help feeling that they had some deeper object.

CHAPTER VIII

NERVE WINS

THE tug continued to circle warily round the schooner, and Bevis became more certain that the scoundrels on board her dared do nothing. Below him in the fo'c'sle the evidence of smoke and sound proclaimed that the fire was all but beaten. Things were working out well after all, and he became more comfortable and confident.

Then with benumbing abruptness the mate was shouting:

“There’s a boat under the stern, sir. They’re trying to get at us through the stern ports.”

Even as he yelled, even as Martin Sondes ran across the poop, even as Bevis’s heart chilled with the knowledge that Jennifer and Liliás were down there in that saloon which the ruffians were trying to enter, the tug swung inward heading for the schooner, and from her deck there immediately opened a spattering of pistol fire.

At that moment he heard Jennifer’s voice calling, crying more than an alarm from the saloon below.

The admirable qualities of Martin Sondes were in evidence at once. He was on the alert, in action, even, but he did not lose his head, allowed no one to lose his head.

The Brute

From the saloon stair-head he rapped out a string of orders:

“Probyn, slam that scuttle home and get out your pistol. Harry, Dick, Jim, Glen, drop work, get your guns ready. Shoot into that tug. Don’t hesitate. Don’t let her come aboard. . . . Watch out for other boats!”

He was down the companionway at a bound and into the saloon. Four men had slipped out of the boat that had come up under cover of the tug’s manœuvring. Three were already in the saloon, one was half-way in through the window. As the pistols began to hammer up on deck, Martin Sondes flung himself into a more ugly struggle.

Two of the men held Liliias and were struggling with her, and not too successfully, for she fought like a great cat. The third man held Jennifer down on the broad seat. He had her tightly, a great arm crushing all resistance out of the slim body, while his free hand held the point of a cruel broad-bladed knife to her throat. He was saying in snarling English:

“De mon-ney. De place where dat mon-ney is hid. Listen! You tella damn queek.”

Jennifer, teeth deep in lip, shook her head. The knife-point pecked into the little soft cup where the throat sinks to the chest. She gave a little moan.

“Queek!” snarled the man. “Dat mon-ney damn sharp.”

At the foot of the accommodation stair Martin Sondes checked and fired. It was a brilliant snap-

Nerve Wins

shot at an angle, and it was successful. The man spun half-round, as Martin expected he would, and dropped in a heap on to Jennifer—the knife clear of her throat.

The man just in through the stern lights flung himself forward at Martin's legs, staggering him. The two others hurled Liliias aside and flung themselves on the captain. He went down under the heap of them. Jennifer dazed, in pain, dragged herself from under the dead man, looked on the writhing and stamping group with horrified eyes. She was numb before this growling and animal encounter. It was Liliias, soft, powerful, her splendid lithe shoulders and arms showing white through her rent blouse, who bent forward and picked up the fallen dagger.

From the gout of clawing, punching men a dago flopped, yelping. He no longer had any desire to fight. Sondes's fist had done that much for him. But he was still dangerous. Martin rearing up, one man caught by the throat, the other with his face held tightly against Martin's body, staggered across the cabin. The man who had fallen thrust out a foot and Sonders crashed.

One dago tore free from the hand at his throat in that impact, the other writhed sideways and locked Martin's arms and legs for an instant. He knew that an instant would be enough, and shouted:

“The knife, quick!”

The other, with the spring of a cat, came with the knife for Sondes's broad, defenceless back.

It was Liliias who stopped him. A cat, a panther

The Brute

herself, she leaped forward to meet the dago as he sprang. She thrust out her knife with a strong, straight arm. There was no skill in her action, but it sufficed; the impetus of the man's own movement took him on to the point. It entered at the armpit, just under the biceps, and his stabbing arm was powerless.

He had only begun to scream when Martin's fist slammed him right across the cabin. A heave, and the man clinging to the captain was tossed through the air, to come smashing against the edge of the broad seat under the stern lights. He wriggled on to his hands, dragged himself to the windows and through them, his left leg trailing at a queer angle. The man who had dropped out of the fight was already half-way through. The one who had been stabbed stopped merely to cast one look at Sondes before bolting on deck and over the side.

That part of the battle was over. Martin sprang to the stern ports, saw that the boat was pulling away and began to close the ports. From above there came a brisk rattle of shooting. He turned back at once, faced Jennifer.

"Get these closed," he said, then he saw she was trembling. "You're not hurt?"

"No," she whispered, "I'm not hurt."

Did she half expect some sympathy? She did not get it. His eyes swept from her to Lilius, big, splendid, laughing softly in his face. His head indicated the windows, as though he knew it was not necessary to give her an order. Then, as he moved towards the

Nerve Wins

deck, he saw his pistol, picked it up, came back and gave it not to Jennifer but to Liliás.

“You’ll know now you don’t have to be delicate with that,” he said, and went quickly upon deck.

Liliás, swinging the last port to, turned and laughed outright.

“He’s a tremendous, a great, ruthless berserker of a man—I love him!”

Jennifer only shuddered and cried: “It’s brutish! Disgustingly brutal!”

But her heart was feeling sore. It had been Liliás who had saved his life. It had been to Liliás he had turned in the crisis. Liliás had satisfied him. For no reason at all that hurt Jennifer.

On deck the situation was looking ugly. The tug was bearing down on the *Evelyn Hope* in clumsy, sheering bumps. She was steering like a sick elephant, for the man at the wheel was not of the stuff of heroes, and worked the spokes flat on his stomach—the shooting from the schooner had been much too accurate for his taste. His orders were to put the two vessels alongside, but from the look of things he was more likely to drop the tug pounding on to the schooner’s deck from the crest of one of the big, slow waves beating in from the harbour mouth.

His companions and masters on the tug may have realized this, and no doubt it was the reason why their shooting, though vigorous and frequent, was very bad. All the same the snapping of the shots and the whine of the bullets overhead were unnerving to Paul and Bevis.

The Brute

Martin Sondes seemed to take such things as a matter of course. He stood fully exposed on the poop, staring with speculative eyes at the tug, the harbour mouth and the sea beyond. He moved over to his mate, took his pistol and ordered:

“Get the engine started up. Tell Jim to stand by to slip that kedge.”

He ran to the wheel. In a moment or two the roar of the auxiliary engine lifted through the ship, the screw began to bite, and the *Evelyn Hope* started to point ahead, straining at the kedge anchor.

“Let her go!” Martin yelled, and the schooner thrilled and stepped forward. The tug was sidling towards them, lifting high, hanging over them, threatening to come crash on to the starboard bow.

“Full astern!” shouted Sondes, and put the wheel over.

He had timed his movement like a boxer side-stepping. The tug, her engines rung to full-speed ahead to meet the schooner’s movement, swooped giddily downward on to the *Evelyn Hope’s* very stem. A few feet clearance, and that was all. It was enough. The schooner, turning inside, wore round until the tug passed her length. Then she straightened, and went ahead; she sprang past the crazy tender so close astern that Bevis Probyn, looking down, felt that he could have leaped on to the tug’s deck.

The tug was clawing and sliding and backing like a bull that has overshot its victim. Pascobas was frantically striving to bring her round. The *Evelyn*

Nerve Wins

Hope, pointing her pretty nose straight at the angry water at the harbour mouth, headed for sea.

Jim, the deck hand, coiling down after slipping the kedge, looked at the sea outside the harbour, at Sondes at the wheel, and then with an anxious grin at Probyn.

“Shall we be able to get out?” asked Bevis.

“We wouldn’t. Guess he will,” said the hand.

“Dangerous?” asked Bevis.

“For you or me, fatal,” said the man. “For him—he’s made me take miracles as a sorter ’abit.”

No doubt about the hero-worship there! Martin Sondes might seem rough, uncouth, brutalized to their Mayfair tastes, but he was a real man to the real men who served him.

A snapping of orders came from the wheel; the man leaped to do incomprehensible things with the sails. The schooner heeled, heading, Bevis felt sure, straight at the harbour wall. He was beginning to hold his breath for the crash when he heard the whistle of a bullet near his head.

Pascobas had clawed the tug round and she was racing to pass them. Crazy though her engines were they could beat the auxiliary motor on the *Evelyn Hope*. And those on her were shooting. Bevis guessed rather than saw that the fusillade must be mainly directed at Sondes, standing firm and four-square at the wheel. The ruffians hoped to shake him and bring disaster to the schooner, but he showed no sign—only kept the schooner heading steadily at the harbour opening.

The Brute

Bevis did his best to distract attention by firing at the tug, now well abreast, but soon he stopped. The schooner was beginning to feel the thrust of the heavy seas, the pound of them, the smash of them on her fo'c'sle head. Accurate shooting was impossible, and the interest of all was centred on the race for the harbour mouth between the schooner and the tug—a desperate race in a desperate sea that stopped all men's breaths and all desire to shoot.

It seemed inevitable that tug and schooner would come together in the very harbour mouth with a ghastly smash. They were heading on lines bound to bring them together. It was a matter of nerves; of which helmsman would hold longer to the course. They thrust nearer to each other. The rage of the incoming seas caught them and tossed them dangerously. The sea walls of the harbour came close to them, caging them. Nerve—a matter of nerve! Martin Sondes, at his wheel, looked to have nerves of iron. Pascobas would never stand up to him.

Pascobas, in fact, did not want to, but behind him, jumping on anxious toes, stood the long, thin figure of Cipriano Bravo, and Cipriano's pistol was far too close to Pascobas's belt-line. The tug-skipper raved of danger and a watery death, but Cipriano's pistol said, "Go on," and Pascobas went on.

Sondes seemed to realize it. He yelled orders sharply, put over his wheel. Bevis sighed; he had not expected Martin Sondes to give in. Then he laughed. Sondes had done anything but that. He

Nerve Wins

had altered course, but in the wrong direction—he was going slap at the tug!

He was bearing down on her in a smother of angry water. As the *Evelyn Hope* lifted, those on the tug saw her cruel forefoot gleaming, and could guess to an inch on what spot abaft the engine-room it would smash home. Pascobas saw it too well, so did Cipriano—and they knew Martin Sondes, knew he was not a man to stop for such a trifle as a tug full of dagos.

Pascobas screamed and wrenched the wheel over, and Cipriano let him do it. He only cursed when he saw the schooner swing off, shaving them by inches, escaping. By that time the tug was round too far for recovery; Pascobas, indeed, was occupied in preventing his crazy craft from ramming the sea wall; he had no time even to think of the seven thousand pounds on the schooner.

On the *Evelyn Hope* they also had their preoccupations. The mate was at the wheel, and Martin and the two Britishers were busy with the crew. They were kicking them out of the still smouldering fo'c'sle back to their work. There was need of it; to claw away from the harbour was a fight with death, with only the seamanship of Sondes to pull them through.

As for the fire in the fo'c'sle—they took enough seas aboard to deal with what was left of that.

CHAPTER IX

LILIAS

PAUL and Bevis learnt, through a night of labour and weariness that nearly killed them, what it meant to claw a schooner out from land against that terrible sea.

They laboured on the ropes waist deep in water, they worked on the yards clinging like leeches. They reeled drunken with fatigue and Martin Sondes and the mate lashed them awake with their tongues. Paul, sullenly, remembered he ought to rebel in those moments when he was not swept clean away by the sheer, sweeping force of necessary work. Once he did rebel, or he thought he did. He snarled revolt at a ruthless figure that bawled orders, and the next instant he found himself flung along the deck and attached to halliards as though some power stronger than his own had mastered him. He did not know whether he had been attacked physically, or whether the force of the weather and circumstances had rendered his obedience automatic.

Long before dawn both men were wooden figures, doing what was ordered almost unconsciously and despite fatigue. They even did not kick dagos when they snivelled, just shoved them aside so that they should not hamper work. By dawn they were well off the coast, spinning down it on a snoring wind.

Lilias

Martin Sondes, still four-square, a man of iron, gave his last commands and they trailed limply to the saloon. They had some sleep but Martin Sondes did not sleep. It was afternoon before he left the deck. It was then they saw that he had been wounded.

Jennifer felt a little thrill when she saw the rough bandage round his arm, but again it was Lilias who acted. It was obvious that she delighted in this chance of a flirtation. She went up to him, touched the bandage, and said: "I think I had better deal with that."

"No need," he said calmly, looking straight at her. "Topi has already done what is necessary."

"So I saw," she smiled, "but a wound is better for expert dressing."

"This is only a scratch, and I am quite comfortable."

She deliberately undid the bandage, her fingers felt swiftly and knowledgeably at the red score a bullet had made across the flexoids, and those fingers did more. Jennifer could see how seductively they caressed and lingered over the great muscles of the big arm, and again she felt that soreness in her heart.

The man was a brute. He had treated her with a rudeness and harshness that was unforgivable. His attitude suggested that she, the acknowledged beauty of her set, was of very small account to him. She hated him—and yet it hurt her that Lilias and not

The Brute

herself was dealing with that wound. It almost pained her to feel that Liliás was winning him.

But she wasn't, really. Martin Sondes was as calm and as hard as ever under Liliás's trained seductions. He was even looking down at the big, soft, smiling girl with a hint of appraisal and amusement in his level glance.

"I believe," thought Jennifer, "he has her measure." There was nothing at all spiteful in Jennifer's make-up, and yet she was strangely pleased at the thought. . . . Queer, for she was certain she hated Martin Sondes.

"Does it surprise you that a pretty and luxurious and utterly inconsequent person like me shows herself possessed of practical virtues?" Liliás smiled up to Martin Sondes as she selected dressings from the ship's drug chest.

"I'm afraid it doesn't," said Martin calmly, "I have heard that Red Cross work is common in most circles."

"What a pity!" she said in her slow mockery. "You rob my one gift of the charm of surprise."

"So I guessed," he said quietly, and Liliás taken aback dropped her slow glance. That was a trifle too direct even from an adorable brute. It showed far too much penetration. He was practically—well, warning her off. Something within her—anger or determination—stiffened.

To Jennifer the words had brought almost pleasure. Why? She did not know why. She did know, however, that this big man—whom she hated—was not

Lilias

at all in danger of falling under the spell of Lilias. She became almost friendly to the man. She turned quickly from the contemplation of the matted jungle that slid by the ship far away to port, and came towards the pair. She said:

“Captain Sondes, I haven’t thanked you—I can’t ever thank you properly, for saving my life last night.”

He looked at her steadily over Lilias’s shoulder. Did he realize the beauty, the fresh loveliness of her proud and exquisite little face? He showed no sign of it. He said simply:

“We don’t thank each other for that sort of thing out here, Miss Daun. It is so much a matter of course.”

“That,” Lilias observed, standing back and giving him the full, deep fire of her dark eyes, “that explains why you haven’t thanked me for saving yours, Captain Sondes.”

Her face expressed the mocking boldness of her words. She was very beautiful in her slow, rich, enticing way.

“You want me to thank you, Miss Seyler?”

“Perhaps not, but to *remember*—yes.”

“That is one of the reasons why we don’t thank,” he said with a grim smile. “We don’t want people to feel that it is remembered against them, we don’t want them to feel beholden.”

Lilias gave him a quick, frowning look. Really, for a brute he was dangerously shrewd—and bold.

The Brute

“You don’t want Jennifer to feel under any obligation?” she asked softly.

“She is under none.”

“I have not your generous spirit. I like people to be under obligation to me,” Liliias smiled.

“So I saw.”

The full, soft lips smiling at him suddenly compressed, the lashes dropped to hide the flash of anger that leaped to her eyes. The brute was not so simple after all, or rather he was clever enough to know that simple downrightness was the most effective shield against her soft, purring and feline arts. She felt baffled, she felt angry, but she felt anything but beaten. She would teach him a lesson, the lesson that Delilah taught that other Samson who was, undoubtedly, just as rude and as boorish and sure of himself. She would both play with and punish the fellow.

She allowed her dark eyes to rest glowingly on his.

“As long as you see, Martin”— a deliberate pause —“Sondes, we understand each other.”

“Yes,” he said, “I *understand*.”

She could have stamped her foot in anger against the calm, sure way he turned her own weapons against her. Jennifer who had been queerly disturbed by Liliias’s seductive tactics almost laughed at her friend’s defeat. Martin Sondes saw through Liliias—she was almost glad that he was immune. Yet, to prevent herself showing that gladness, she left the pair and went on deck.

“You have driven her away,” Liliias, quick to make

Lilias

the most of things, said. She was bending over the bandage so that her dark hair touched his cheek—she knew the effect of that on men. “You are too harsh and jarring an experience for her, Martin Sondes.”

“That is more than likely,” he agreed evenly.

“You don’t seem to mind her detesting you,” she whispered.

“You exaggerate her interest,” he answered quietly.

“Is that modesty or indifference?” she smiled.

“Does it matter?”

“No,” she admitted, “I suppose it doesn’t.” She was wondering whether it really was indifference in him, or strength. But she knew awe of strength was flattering. “I suppose to a man as strong as you it is immaterial what we butterfly women think of you?”

That ought to entangle him. He might say something harsh about butterfly women, and she could make the most of that—with Jennifer. He might rise to a compliment, and she could make the most of that—for herself.

“It is certainly immaterial what I think of them,” he said quietly, and again she could have stamped at the calm way he had walked out of her trap.

“That’s it,” she murmured, adjusting his bandage so that he could feel the play of her long, delicate fingers on his absurdly strong arm. “You are strong enough not to care either way. You’re frightfully strong, Martin—and frightening. *I’m* frightened of you.”

The Brute

That was an old trick of hers. Tell a man you are afraid of him and he immediately sees himself as an irresistible conqueror and sets out to play the part.

"If that is true," said Martin Sondes with his grim smile, "you are undergoing an experience unique for you. But it doesn't happen to be true, Miss Seyler."

He went out in his usual swift way leaving her furiously angry. He had had her measure all the time, and he had snubbed her—*her!*

Paul Glen, coming into the cabin a moment later, found her by the table with a look of slow, cruel anger upon her face. He stared at her, asked:

"What is it, Liliias? Anything wrong?"

She heard his voice before she saw him, but at once her quick wits were at work. She turned to him with a really brilliant gasp of relief.

"Oh, Paul," she cried with a half sob, which was not altogether artificial, "I'm glad you came. I'm glad *he* heard you coming!"

Paul was only too ready to jump at a conclusion.

"What is it? That was Sondes in here, wasn't it? What's he been up to now?"

Liliias had all the appearances of pulling herself together: "Oh, it's all right. . . . it doesn't matter. I was foolish. . . . We can't have more trouble. Only—well, my dear, I'm glad you came when you did."

"Has that cur been. . . ."

"No! No! It's really all right," she cried with

Lilias

an air of soothing him. "It's—well, he can't help being uncouth, only sometimes he carries it too far."

"That's a fact," said Paul furiously. "He wants keeping in his place."

"Especially where women are concerned," whispered Lilias.

"By God!" snarled Paul. "That's the sort of beast he is, is he? I suspected it. He'd better be careful."

With his mouth set grimly he stamped up on deck, where he stood glaring at the broad back of the captain. He would have been glad of any excuse for fighting Sondes, but there was none. Martin Sondes was attending to his duties as though there was no such thing as a feminine skirt within a thousand miles.

Lilias watched Paul go up to the deck with darkly smiling eyes: "I can always make life amusing," she told herself. "If he thinks I am an up-to-date edition of a vampire I had better play up to the character. . . . Besides he must feel, realize, that I am not to be despised."

If Martin Sondes had looked into her dark eyes as she stared up the companionway he might have known some uneasiness. This was certainly not a woman to be treated lightly in hate—or in love.

CHAPTER X

MY LADY DEVIL

AFTER a day of perfect sailing, the wind dropped and left them all but becalmed off the gold-green coast that showed blurred and mysterious through the heat haze on their port beam.

For the best part of the second day these conditions continued, and yet, in the afternoon, they saw a topsail lifting above the horizon astern. There was nothing particularly remarkable about that topsail save that, though there was so definite a lack of wind that the *Evelyn Hope* was barely making steerageway, the vessel that they had sighted must be coming after them at at least an eight-knot clip.

Also there was the fact that neither Martin Sondes nor his mate were pleased at its appearance.

"It's the *Donna Diaba*," Martin Sondes told Jennifer when she asked, and he laughed shortly. "*My Lady Devil*, she is well christened."

"How can you tell who she is?" asked Jennifer, who was finding herself on an increasingly friendly footing with Martin Sondes.

"By that patch on the tops'l."

"They seem to have the wind," Bevis remarked.

"No, that's their auxiliary. It's a big American crude-oil engine and they are crowding it."

They all turned quickly at that. "You mean," said

My Lady Devil

Jennifer in a queer voice, "that vessel is following us?"

"Pascobas owns a half share in her," said Martin Sondes. He measured the distance to the *Donna Diaba* with a casual glance, swept the shore with his eyes and walked forward to talk with the mate. When he came back to the group Jennifer said:

"Pascobas, after all, is the least dangerous of those ruffians."

"He'll have Cipriano on board," said Martin Sondes. "Cipriano will have seen to that. Gonzala, the skipper of the *Donna*, is as big a brute as the others, too—and a good seaman into the bargain. He is a big, tough, daring fellow with the manners of a nobleman. He's not so unscrupulous as the others, but, in his way, quite as ruthless. A dangerous man, and not an utterly ignoble one."

"You speak almost with affection for his qualities," said Liliias softly.

"I speak of him as I have found him. He is not a bad fellow to meet, but a wicked one to tackle on a business like ours. He'll not be put off unless we stop him, or until he gets that seven thousand pounds into his strong-room."

"You seem to have a fondness for brutes," sneered Paul.

"I prefer them to mean whites," Martin said quietly. "There is at least one white man I'd see hanged before I'd hang Gonzala."

"The man who did such terrible things to the friendly Indians?" asked Jennifer.

The Brute

“Yes, that man, though that wasn’t his only piece of villainy. There are other things for which that man must pay some day. He’s rotten all through, that man, though he was a gentleman once. He’s slipped me half a dozen times when I thought the hunt was ended—but I’ll get him yet.” He laughed. “If you like, that is a reason why we need not fear those dagos on the *Donna*—I’ve simply got to go on existing until I catch that gentleman and deal with him.”

There was a hint of inexorable passion in Martin Sondes’s voice that held the others silent. As they stood, weighted by the atmosphere of ruthlessness this man had thrown out, there came the stammer of the oil-engine of the *Evelyn Hope* picking up and getting into its stride. Soon it settled down to workmanlike throbbing and the schooner began to press ahead, swinging a point towards port and heading closer in shore.

The noise of the auxiliary motor seemed to break the spell of oppression Martin Sondes’s words had caused. The party stirred in relief. Liliias’s slurring voice came:

“So *you* as well as Jennifer are an instrument of vengeance, Captain Sondes? And you seem to follow parallel ideals. You hunt a man who has done great wrongs, Jennifer does exactly the same. And you both hunt him on this very South American sea-board. Isn’t that very curious?”

Her mocking eyes passed from Martin Sondes’s face to Jennifer’s. There was a queer, bright light

My Lady Devil

in her glance as though, suddenly, she had guessed at some secret, was enjoying some hidden and malicious joke. Jennifer, Bevis, Paul, knowing her, felt uncomfortable. She went on:

“You must tell us all about your hunting, Captain Sondes. It will be thrilling to hear you two avengers comparing notes—and who knows how useful?” Her low laugh marked her words, underlined them. “Who knows but that will be the very means for each to find the prey!”

Again she laughed, again all were uncomfortable, and more than uncomfortable. It was as though Lilius with her feline intuitions had touched upon something hinting at future danger. They were all silent, oppressed. They stood without speaking, staring at the lifting sails of the *Donna Diaba* astern.

All that afternoon the *Evelyn Hope* ran up the sullen, sun-harsh coast, and all that afternoon the *Donna Diaba* crept up on her.

They could not shake her off. Without adequate wind the race was a tussle between oil engines, and the more powerful American motor won. She came up and up, lifting above the horizon line, growing nearer, bulking larger. Her advance was slow but inexorable. An hour before sunset she was almost abeam. The anxious passengers on the schooner and the more anxious crew watched the sun shining in a swathe of orange glory along her sleek, black hull, and on her patched and dirty sails. She was ominous. She followed silent, inscrutable, relentless, graceful. In the dead tropic quiet muffling that sun-

The Brute

drenched world, all seemed to experience a sense of bated breath, as though the murderers on the pursuing deck threw out a miasma of evil.

And still she came on and on.

“She’s like the Hound of Heaven,” said Liliias softly; and, in her slurring and penetrating voice, she quoted the lines:

“Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
With unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet——”

Martin Sondes, behind her, said quietly:

“They beat, and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet,
‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’ ”

“That’s quoted out of place,” said Liliias, turning to him, “and I don’t see that it is quite apt.”

“Don’t you?” he said, and he looked straight at her.

She stared at him, and quite suddenly the word “betray” leaped into her mind. She gasped, and knew he had meant her to see that. That meant—what did it mean? Did he realize that she meant to cause friction? Did he know that she had tried to set him against Jennifer and Paul against him? . . . Had he, too, also his intuitions and felt that in drawing a parallel between his man-hunt and Jennifer’s she was on mischief bent? That almost made her gasp again, because it was so nearly playing into her hands. But even that satisfaction was overcome

My Lady Devil

by her anger at his words. He had accused her. He had named her "betrayed," traitor. He had seen through her and—and insulted her. Her strong hands clenched and she could have struck him. So Delilah might have looked had Samson exposed her treachery.

But Martin Sondes had finished with her; he was talking quietly to Jennifer.

"That oil engine of hers has given her the pace of us. If it was a mere matter of sailing they would never have caught us. Now we must depend upon something more than seamanship to save ourselves."

"If we could only put that wretched engine out of action!" she cried.

He looked at her quickly and laughed.

"We are visited by the same idea, Miss Daun."

"But that doesn't help us to do it?"

"You have no suggestion?"

"Nothing." She smiled back, and she was very beautiful when she smiled. "I am thinking of long-range guns, and all that sort of thing. But those thoughts are wild."

"Have you any plans yourself, Captain Sondes?" asked Paul, in his aloof voice.

Martin Sondes nodded. He took a step towards the quartermaster, gave an order to the mate, and stood watching as the ship began to wear. He was heading her, it seemed, straight towards the coast.

"That is the first move in my plan," he said, returning to them.

"Setting riddles for your passengers is rather a

The Brute

childish sport, isn't it, Captain." said Liliias, her voice not so purring as usual.

"There is no riddle here," he answered evenly. "I'm going to try and beat Gonzala by cunning, that is all. You probably recognize the reasons for that. He has a bigger crew aboard. They are more reliable than my lot. They are also ruffians. He undoubtedly intends to lay aboard me, if he can; at night if possible, by day if necessary. He intends to do it willy-nilly, and if he does it successfully, we're done. Gonzala, as a ruffian, is thorough. He will get us anyhow, but he will prefer to do it comfortably and without fuss." He turned upon them eyes that twinkled a little. "I intend to give him his chance of doing it comfortably and without fuss."

His listeners gave a little gasp.

Paul cried indignantly:

"I say. I don't see that you have any reason for running us into unnecessary danger."

It was Jennifer who quenched his protest.

"Be quiet, Paul," she said evenly. "I don't think Captain Sondes is the one to do anything like that."

Her eyes were fixed steadily on Martin Sondes. Liliias saw the reliance in them and sneered:

"Ah, so we begin to understand our resolute captain?"

"Yes, I think I am understanding," Jennifer answered; and Liliias frowned at the light she saw coming into the girl's eyes.

"There will be danger," said Sondes, a little curtly. "Real danger. I do not minimize it. On the other

My Lady Devil

hand, my plan should be effective. We face, as you know, a two-fold risk from these brutes. The first is direct. While they are hanging on our heels there is always danger of attack. We're going to try and stop them hanging on to our heels. If we do that, we will solve the other danger, too. You understand that to reach Fogasta with these people dogging us, making trouble, will simply wreck the whole plan for rescuing Ronald Buckingham."

"Who?" asked Liliás, as though surprised at the name; and Jennifer, Paul, and Bevis frowned quickly at her slip.

Sondes looked at her coldly as he answered:

"Ronald Buckingham, Miss Daun's half-brother."

"Of course, of course!" cried Liliás; and the confusion she did not feel at all (for her "apparent" slip was deliberate) was extremely well done. "That was extremely stupid of me! I was forgetting."

Martin Sondes's eyes rested upon her for a minute. She knew that she had set him thinking, set his suspicions working, but she knew, too, that he could read the lie. The word "betray" came into her mind once more, as though he had sent it there, and she was filled with a cold fury against him.

Nevertheless, he went on evenly:

"We cannot let those people know we are going to Fogasta, even. For them to follow us there will arouse an attention and suspicion that will be fatal to our aim. It will mean prison—a Latin-American prison—or worse, for us if they give our intentions away."

The Brute

“They don’t know our intentions?” said Paul.

“No, but they will discover them. People of your stamp with seven thousand pounds of ready money on them do not go to Fogasta merely for pleasure, and the mere presence of that money—well the citizens of Fogasta, from the president down, have the national instinct for sequestrating cash. Our friends must not follow us to Fogasta. We have to stop them. We will try to. But I warn you it is going to be a desperate business, and you will all be in it.”

Jennifer smiled at him.

“We anticipated desperate things when we started out, Captain Sondes,” she said, “we have not changed, though we are learning, perhaps, how green we were at the beginning.”

“Learning fast and well, I think,” he answered; and Liliás’s eyes smouldered at his tone.

Before the bows of the *Evelyn Hope*, in the dense tangle of jungle coming down into the very sea itself, a broad sombre lane was opening out. The schooner headed for this lane, making, it seemed, right into the heart of the virgin forest. As the massed trees robbed them of the wind and the sails began to shudder and snap, Martin Sondes turned and looked towards the *Donna Diaba*. She, too, had swung to port, was following them in.

A green, heavy dusk took them as they slid between walls of verdure. The threatening mass of the humid and brooding forest closed about them. Its silence was brooding, too; heavy, thick, oppressive. The hammer of the motor came back as though from solid

My Lady Devil

walls. The whisper of the ropes and the creak of the blocks sounded eerily. It was like sailing in a tomb over the waters of the dead.

Thick trees were everywhere, crowding down to the water's edge, into the water itself. Mangue roots stood out of the dark, coffee-coloured stream like writhing snakes, glistening, loathsome. Aninga weed, with its pale dank flowers, packed the banks and fought for the water; behind it birity palm and ciriuba and paradise wood and rank upon rank of trees massed back to apparent infinity. And lashing all together were the vines; the cipos, star flowered and dripping green, that seemed to let down evil, greedily clutching feelers; above all the devil vine with its twisted ropes that strangled trees to death. A thick, dank mass of evil it was, smelling of secret and terrible decay, the breath of it coming out thick, hot, foul and fever-laden from the swamps about the roots.

On the tree summits, where they shot up towering to reach the sun, the dying day was setting a band of gold, and in the gold was the jewel shine of umbrella heads of rare, blazing flowers. Butter-yellow and scarlet, heliotrope and purple, blue and deep ox-blood red, they shone with a fabulously bright prodigality in the blaze of the sunlight; and down the trees were strewn hanging flowers, glinting amid the green, like gems dropped from the profusion above and caught in the fine, emerald scarves of the vines. And across and across birds flashed, the flamingo like a streak of fire; the hyacinthine macaw a skimming

The Brute

jewel and a myriad other wing-beats, each a flash of living colour. The beauty and the brooding of the jungle enfolded the schooner. Its colouring had a passionate allure, yet the dry barking of the bearded monkeys in the dark depths sounded like a witch's warning.

All sails were furled; only the auxiliary motor drummed on and the wall of the jungle hedged them forever.

"This rather thrills me," Liliás cried softly. "I feel like coming home—I feel a jungle power in me."

"I feel oppressed and afraid," said Jennifer.

"Isn't there even a loophole in this green wall?"

Martin Sondes gave an order, the *Evelyn Hope* swung to starboard. As before, there opened out ahead a channel, so narrow that it seemed the gloomy and evil mass of verdure on either side could send out its octopus arms of vines to pluck them from the very deck.

Down this channel they went a short way and came into a still lagoon sitting sombrely in the heart of the trees. Again a command and then the roaring of the anchor chain forward amid a great stamping and bustling of men.

"You're anchoring here for the night?" Bevis asked.

"Not exactly," Sondes said. "That noise forward is for the benefit of Gonzala. He'll be certain I've got my hook deep in this mud for the night. He will be pleased to hear it. What you heard was mainly

My Lady Devil

chain—and noisy at that. There goes my real anchor.”

A boat dropped from the side of the schooner and shot towards the nearest trees. In a very short time the vessel was securely tied up by warps that could be easily slipped.

Deep silence enfolded them again. Once more they seemed to be in a dead world, with the witch bark of the monkeys emphasizing its lifelessness. Then gradually they heard, building up through the silence, the harsh hammering of the *Donna Diaba's* motor.

“You’ll see her if you look astern,” said Martin Sondes. “I’ve arranged that everybody should get a good view.”

In a minute they saw the long, sleek profile of the *Donna Diaba* slide past the end of the channel, and men crowded her rail staring at the *Evelyn Hope*. Jennifer even saw, through the leaves, a man high in the cross-trees. Then the wall of jungle blocked the view and the sinister vessel was gone.

But they could hear her. In that jungle silence sounds carried with a stark and uncanny penetration. The hammer of the auxiliary engine was shut off, there came the barking of orders, the commotion and the shouting of men working hastily; the distinct and emphatic noise of a ship coming to anchor. But only in a figurative sense. There was no roaring of anchor chain through the hawse-hole of the *Donna Diaba*.

“Just tying up,” said Sondes, with his even smile.

The Brute

“An alert customer, Gonzala. He’ll be ready to slip down on me at the first clink of my windlass or the snarl of my anchor chain coming in. He feels he has us safe, but is taking no risks.”

“But you can slip off as quickly as he,” said Jennifer.

“He doesn’t know that,” Sondes explained. “I hope he is convinced by the sounds he heard that I am so rooted in here that it’ll take me the best part of half an hour to get under way. As a matter of fact, we could go out now—tow out with muffled oars—and he’d never know.”

“But that wouldn’t serve our purpose?” Bevis suggested.

“We’ve got to stop those merchants coming after us to Fogasta,” said Sondes. He thought a minute. “This is my plan. The *Donna Diaba* is in another creek a quarter of a mile above this. Gonzala feels safe there. He’ll probably have a boat watching us, anyhow. To-night he intends to attack us.”

“Surely they know that we’ll be expecting them?” Glen objected.

“That won’t make any difference to Gonzala or Cipriano,” Sondes said. “They have numbers on their side. They know our crew won’t fight. In fact, they are not going to, Mr. Glen. They’re going to be packed into the fo’c’sle, and you and Mr. Probyn will see that they don’t get out of it.”

Paul frowned darkly. Liliias murmured:

“Policeman’s work seems to be your lot, Paul.

My Lady Devil

You will be fully trained by the time you reach London again."

Under the sting of that Paul said huffily:

"I think I would prefer something more active or sporting, Captain Sondes."

"We're not being sporting," Martin answered grimly. "This is business, the business of fighting for our lives. I'm giving you the job you are best for."

"And you will do as you are told—like a good boy," murmured Liliás in Paul's ear.

If Martin Sondes heard her whisper to Paul, he made no sign. It was Bevis Probyn who looked anxious, and said:

"And, of course, we will be in danger from an attack from outside, too?"

"Plenty of danger," Sondes assured him grimly. "There may be even an occasion for Miss Seyler to use her fighting qualities."

"Ah, you recognize I have them?" she said with her lazy, veiled smile.

"I appreciate all your capacities," he retorted evenly.

Their eyes met, and Liliás saw that he knew her through and through and meant to fight her. It was in that look of recognition, that war was declared between them.

Sondes went on:

"I am serving out arms to you. I hope you will not have to use them. If it becomes necessary you must not hesitate for a moment. You must under-

The Brute

stand you are up against men who will kill at the slightest weakness."

Jennifer said with a note in her voice that made Liliás sneer:

"This is all about *us*. You are telling us what to do presently. Won't you be here, Captain Sondes?"

"Not all the time," he said.

"Where will you be?" she demanded, and her voice was a little breathless.

"I am going to put their motor out of action," he answered.

"Alone?" cried Jennifer, and her tone made Bevis look at her quickly. "You are going to that ship alone?"

"It will be best done alone," said Martin.

Liliás's lip curled. Her searching eyes saw that he had reacted to the tone in Jennifer's voice. He had reddened.

"So you are not so indifferent to one woman, anyhow," her mind cried, and her heart grew bitter.

"That is too dangerous," Jennifer protested in a voice that strove to be steady. "You can't possibly venture alone on to that ship full of ruffians"—her voice shook—"only too ready to kill you out of hand."

"Being alone will be safer, Miss Daun," said Sondes, his own voice unexpectedly gentle. "Alone I can slip aboard and do what has to be done unseen."

"No; it is dangerous," Jennifer cried. "It—it endangers our expedition."

"Not if my plan works out," Sondes said. "And I think it will. You see, I am to slip on board when

My Lady Devil

there will be few men left on the ship." He measured her with a glance. "To be exact, the crew of the *Donna Diaba* will have left her to attack—you."

They were all silent for a minute. He went on:

"My plan is sensible, I think. There will be, as I say, a boat watching us off this creek. They will depend on that boat to give them warning of anything untoward happening here. I intend to deal with that boat. When I have secured it, and the men in it, the *Evelyn Hope* will slip her warps and put out to sea. The tide will be on the run; that will help to carry her down. The schooner will be safe then. I will go up to the creek where the *Donna* is tied up. I will watch the crew get away to attack an *Evelyn Hope* that has not waited for them. When they are gone I will go aboard and deal with that engine. It is all straightforward enough."

"Save for one thing. How do you get away, Captain?"

"I will come straight down the river and out to sea to you. The schooner will be hanging about for me."

"You must have somebody to look after the boat while you are on board—perhaps to shoot while you are escaping," Jennifer advised.

"No need. The boat I will use has a portable rudder motor. One man can do all he needs in a craft of that sort."

"And if the boat is seen while you are out of it? What is to prevent a deck hand on the *Donna* sinking

The Brute

it? Nothing, of course. You must have someone with you!" Jennifer's tone was final.

"No," said Sondes. "This schooner has to be worked out, the crew watched, the defence undertaken. Not a man can be spared."

"I wasn't thinking of a man," said Jennifer, her colour heightening. "*I'm coming!*"

Martin stared and said:

"Hardly your job, Miss Jennifer."

"I'm coming!" she announced finally. "This time I'll keep my nerve. And I can shoot."

"No," said Sondes. "Much too risky!"

"Don't you think I am to be trusted?" she cried defiantly.

He looked at her.

"Yes, you are to be trusted. That isn't the reason."

"It's a matter of sex and sentiment," said Lilius.

"That is it," he answered quietly.

"There's no room for sentiment in a business like ours," Jennifer insisted, with a little laugh. "I've heard you say words to that effect, Captain Sondes, and there was never greater truth in them than at this moment. Nothing counts save carrying through effectively the thing we have to do, and to do that you must have an assistant. So that is settled. I come. I assure you I will not be a nuisance. As for sex, that won't be perceptible."

She nodded, and began to move away towards the cabin. Paul began to protest.

"Look here, Jennifer. I can't possibly allow this. If anybody runs his neck into it, it'd better be me."

My Lady Devil

“Don’t be an ass, Paul,” Jennifer said crisply. “You stay. There’ll be work for you here!”

She swung along the deck. Without further argument Martin Sondes moved towards the mate.

Lilias said ironically:

“So you are greedy of danger, Martin Sondes?”

“Not greedy,” he said. “It has to be faced.”

“I am not meaning *that* danger.” She smiled at him. “Not physical danger, not danger from the dagos. But a danger from—shall we say a pretty thing in your own boat?”

He stopped and looked at her sternly.

“Do you ever come out into the open with your attacks, Miss Seyler?” he asked sternly.

“Never,” she laughed softly, “unless it makes life more amusing . . . and that reminds me, were you by any chance in Tampica in the May of 1919?”

“What is behind that?” he asked, surprised.

“Is it a question you don’t want to answer?”

“The answer is, I was in Tampica in the May of that year. Your reason for asking?”

“Does a woman ever give her reason? And at San Illara, did you happen to be at San Illara in the November of the same year?”

Martin Sondes was suddenly frowning, eyes bent closely on her.

“I’ll answer that when you tell me your reason for asking,” he said curtly.

“You have answered,” she laughed in his face. “You were there. Can you deny it?”

The Brute

“No need to deny the truth,” he said, his face hard.
“I’ll have an explanation, please.”

“Perhaps,” she jeered at him, “but not yet.”

For a moment her rich, seductive face mocked him, then she was gone, laughing softly. And she left him thrilled with elation. She was already feeling sure that that intuition of hers had been right.

CHAPTER XI

“ALL THINGS BETRAY THEE”

JENNIFER had spoken the truth when she had told Martin Sondes that there would be very little of her sex perceptible on their expedition. As they crouched together under the dense bush of aninga that edged the river, he realized that the figure beside him might have been taken anywhere for that of a slim, strong boy.

Jennifer was wearing a shirt of dun-colored tropic drill, riding breeches of the same material and knee boots. The big, soft straw hat confining her hair had completed the transformation. She was a boy, and, as he had seen her on deck with an automatic pistol against her slim thigh, a very gallant and swashbuckling boy into the bargain.

And yet she was not a boy, never would be a boy. Something came out from her to him that was decisively, deliciously feminine. Her very nearness quickened him. He was touched and stirred in a way he had never known before. It was something that made this adventure taken together finer, more thrilling and at the same time more desperate than any adventure he had ever undertaken. There was wonder in their doing it together and alone, a magnificent comradeship that seemed to swing them to heights of reliance and assurance in each other. An affinity

The Brute

had come to them which told them, without words, how completely they could trust each other.

They had slipped from the *Evelyn Hope* under the cover of darkness, and Martin had paddled their boat stealthily out into the main river. There was a moon. They could see the band of silver it set upon the tree tops, but down at the bottom of this canyon of trees there was no light, though, through tree trunks, they saw the gleam of fireflies, and the ghost-fires of dead trees crumbling in phosphorescent rot.

Behind them they knew that the mate had a warp out from the bow of the schooner, and was ready to swing her nose to the river and out to sea at Martin Sondes's signal. The crew was safely locked in the fo'c'sle, and Bevis, Paul, and the white hands stood on guard.

Their only danger was that the thieves on *Donna Diaba*, in their eagerness to get the money on the *Evelyn Hope*, might begin their attack sooner than Sondes expected. Creeping silently into the main river under the shadow of the bushes, they soon saw that that fear need not affect them. Martin touched the girl's slim arm. Looking across the river she saw two red sparks hanging above the water.

He was on his knee beside her, his mouth very close to hers. He whispered:

"Dagos all over—smoking as dagoish as you please on their watch. Helpful to us. Use that club I gave you if we get close. Hit at the head. Imagine you're 'smashing' your opponent at tennis. No noise."

He was back again on his thwart. He pulled their

“All Things Betray Thee”

boat deep into the river weed, so that they were screened by the leaves. Then he bent, mouth close to the surface of the water—for that is the way to make the voice carry—and called softly, clearly, in perfect Portuguese:

“Comrades! Comrades!”

Both red sparks vanished immediately. Martin called again:

“Don’t shoot, senhors. We are friends. Very good friends! We have escaped from the ship of the Devil Sondes.”

A voice came whispering over the waters:

“The devil you have! Where are you? What in the name of all the saints do you want?”

“We are across the river, almost opposite you,” Martin called back. “Do not make too much noise, friends, the Devil Martino has ears like a telephone. We have news, and it is of immediate importance.”

“I think you lie!” came the voice. “I think we shoot into you!”

“As you will; it is in Heaven’s hands,” said Martin, with the resignation of the Latin. “But I think Cipriano Bravo will do more than shoot you when he learns what you have done.”

“*Peste!*” came the voice. “You have something for Cipriano?”

“We wish to get to the *Donna Diaba* without a moment’s delay,” said Martin—quite truthfully.

“And you swear you are enemies of Devil Martino?”

“If you had been locked in his burning fo’c’sle you would understand our peculiar love for him,” Martin

The Brute

called back. "The others are locked in the fo'c'sle now. Only two of us have escaped. Look, I will show a light—you can shoot us if you will, but that will alarm the Devil Martino, and it will prevent Cipriano getting his news. For both things he will not thank you."

He lit a match, shielding it with his hands.

There was a minute of terrible silence in which Jennifer waited in agony for the shots. Then, quite suddenly, there was a boat creeping like a great beetle across the waters. Jennifer trembled, perhaps with excitement, perhaps a little with fear. Martin Sondes seemed to know it. His hand caught her arm, pressed it with a strong, firm, comradely grip. She was confident at once.

The boat came very close, Martin directing it with whispers. It stopped. A crafty voice said:

"We are friends, then, therefore you will throw your sheathed knives into the boat, comrades."

Jennifer gasped and went cold. They were caught! She had no knife! But she had reckoned without Sondes. He knew his Latin-America too well to be caught thus. A pause, then a knife in its sheath lobbed out towards the boat, into it.

"Good!" said a man in a relieved voice.

"Another knife seemed to swing towards the boat, one of the men snatched at it, but it rapped against the side and slid with the splash of a water rat into the river. Martin began to swear by the body of his favourite saint at the loss of his precious knife. But the thing he had most carefully thrown into the river

“All Things Betray Thee”

was not his knife, but his loaded club. He had sacrificed that because he knew the men in the boat would demand two knives, and he had only one. He prayed that those men would be satisfied with a splash.

They were. They began pulling in to the bushes with silent strokes. They were relieved, confident, for when you have a dago's knife you have him disarmed. The boat came up to the bushes, and Martin, touching Jennifer, pushed through the leaves towards it. He scrambled down into the boat between the two men, his back turned so unguardedly to the rower that that fellow thought the whole affair must be quite innocent.

He still thought it innocent when Martin, staggering clumsily, back-heeled him on the instep. He cried out impatiently. Martin's elbow jarred his mouth. He was knocked backwards into the boat.

“Look out, you clumsy son of a dog!” snapped the steersman; and rose in his seat. “You will upset the boat!”

As he rose Jennifer's club swept down upon his head. He went out without a cry.

And Martin was on top of the man he had knocked over. His hands were at the man's throat.

“Dirt of dirt!” he snarled. “Utter as much as a whimper, and I break you in my hands! I am Martin Sondes—Devil Martin.”

The man gasped and lay deadly still. Martin Sondes was not a man to fool with, as all the coast knew. Martin twisted him on his face, stripped his

The Brute

weapons from him, began to bind him. Jennifer leaned over and whispered.

“Want any help, Martin? My man is knocked out!”

“No help!” he whispered back; and “Well done—Jennifer!”

Very quickly they pinioned and gagged the two men, and left them and their boat so fixed to the river bank that they would be seen in daylight—but not before.

This done they slipped back down stream for a moment until they saw the lights of the *Evelyn Hope* abeam. Martin flashed a signal from an electric torch, and was answered from the deck, and they rowed quietly upstream once more until they came opposite the creek in which the *Donna Diaba* lay.

Their great anxiety, all the time was that the attackers from the dago vessel should come down on them before they were ready, or before the *Evelyn Hope* had escaped to sea. As it proved, there was no need for this fear. They waited an hour in the deadly silence of the river before two boats came out from the *Donna Diaba* and with swift, muffled strokes shot down towards the creek from which the schooner must have long ago escaped.

“We’re in luck,” Martin whispered, breaking the long silence. “They have divided into two parties. Half in those boats, half going through the bush to attack the schooner from the land and distract attention while the boats slip up to her.”

“How do you know they went through the bush?”

“All Things Betray Thee”

“I heard them a few minutes ago. You didn’t—? Well, you haven’t tracker’s ears yet. I must say they did it quietly enough. We’re in for it now. Do you feel all right?”

“Quite all right and I believe—I believe I’m enjoying it, Martin,” she said, with the whisper of a laugh.

“I believe you are,” he laughed back. “And you would, Jennifer.”

Skirting inside shadows they slid into the creek and under the counter of the dark-hulled *Donna Diaba*. The dago is not a good sentinel, and he was, at this moment, too sure of the situation to be careful. They heard two men speaking on the fo’c’sle head, their voices easy and contented. Lights showed in the stern cabin; standing up in the boat and peering through the port, Sondes saw Pascobas sitting under a smoky lamp, drinking. Not for the fat tug-master the glories of a fight!

Gently, moving like a ghost, the boat slid along the ship’s side. Martin and Jennifer heard the pad of naked feet on the deck. They stopped, their hearts throbbing so that they felt the beat of them must be heard. The man had paused at the rail, listening. A moment, an eternity passed. He tossed a handful of fruit pips over the side, so close that some fell on to Jennifer’s knees. Then the padding feet went forward, and the voice of the walker rose, talking to the men on the fo’c’sle head:

“Has it not begun?”

A lazy voice answered him:

“No sound yet, but it must be soon now——”

The Brute

The third man expressed a pious hope that the ladies of the *Evelyn Hope* would be spared to grace the *Donna Diaba* with their presence. His comments made the girl shudder.

Martin's hand closed on Jennifer's at once. He seemed to respond instinctively to her need of reassurance. A moment they listened to the three men lazily talking, then with a pressure he brought her to her feet, guided her hand to the chains, indicated with a touch that she must be ready with her pistol, and like a cat went up and over the side.

She seemed to feel every step, every movement Martin Sondes took upon that terrible ship. She knew that even his cunning and cleverness were at the mercy of chance. If by accident a man saw him there would come the flash of a throwing knife or the spit of a pistol and Martin would be dead.

And she did not want him to die. It was not fear for herself that made her feel as she did. She did not think of herself and what would happen to her alone on that ghastly jungle river and at the mercy of these diabolical men. She thought only of him and the risk he was running. She did not want him to die; her heart was crying out against the thought.

She held on to the chains with one hand, steadying the boat. Her other hand gripped tight on the butt of her pistol and her thoughts followed him step by step.

Now Sondes must be across the deck. He was at the engine room. He was feeling his way into it; no outcry so far. The engine was not guarded; he had

“All Things Betray Thee”

not been seen. Now he was on his knees by the engine, feeling for the place which he had already chosen in his mind. The men talked calmly. The dog monkeys barked and barked without ceasing, and somewhere across the water a body slid with a secret, oily slither into the creek; a watersnake, maybe; an alligator who smelt her, perhaps. But that did not matter; the deck was silent; Martin had not been discovered.

Now he must have placed the bomb he had brought with him in the heart of that engine. In a second he would have drawn the pin, and come back. He was nearly finished, nearly safe——

Then a sudden singing in the night. The voice of Pascobas raised in a sodden love-song, and steadily drawing nearer, nearer. The tug-skipper, tired of his lonely tippling, was coming on deck.

She heard him call brazenly along the deck to the men forward, demanding:

“Is it not time for our little *festa* down the river? Have you not heard the noise of the revelry?”

The men called back, moving towards Pascobas. But still there was no alarm. Everything was all right.

“It must begin any minute,” said a man’s voice calmly.

He saw nothing. Nobody saw anything. It was all right if——

“Who are you, there?” Pascobas suddenly roared like a bull. “What is that man doing by the galley? What is your name?”

The Brute

“Joao, Captain,” came Sondes’s voice; and Jennifer could hear it was close.

“Son of a pig, you are no Joao,” shouted Pascobas. “Vasco! Daurte! That man there. Stop him!”

There were shouts, and the rush of feet. Over Jennifer’s very head two men came together in a heavy impact. She heard a man scream: “Martino Diabo——” And then Martin the Devil must have struck. There was the crisp impact of fist on jaw, the crash of a body on the deck.

“Get him,” roared Pascobas. “Your knife, fool.”

Something sped hissing, gleaming over Jennifer’s head. It swung in a perfect arc until it dived with scarcely a splash into the creek. That was a throwing knife. It had missed Martin, but it told her he was too far along the deck. She called out in her clear voice:

“Martin! Martin! Here!”

Pascobas bellowed:

“Attacked! They are at us in boats.”

He was so surprised that he forgot to be frightened. He bounced to the rail, and Jennifer caught a glimpse of his body.

On the deck came the whip-snap of a pistol, and another, both away from her; then, over her, the answering crack of Martin’s weapon and a scream in answer. Then the figure of Sondes bulked large above her.

But that she saw only instinctively. Her eye was on Pascobas. She saw him reach for his gun with a fat, quick gesture; saw it jerk out and up. Through

“All Things Betray Thee”

what felt an agony of hours she heard herself saying, “He’s going to shoot Martin.” Hours, it seemed, before that pistol began to come down over its mark. But it was in reality a flash of instants only, before the fist dropped and the shot came; her pistol was speaking. Some cool instinct made her level and fire, and there was Pascobas staggering out of sight, one fat hand clasped to ribs, and Martin, laughing quietly, was in the boat and pushing off.

Martin gave the boat a burst of the motor, and they shot skimming into the shadow of the jungle. He shut off, and they swept forward in silence. Two pistols raced through full clips from behind, and they heard the bullets rattling and snapping amid the leaves and branches. A mad tumult had burst out on the *Donna Diaba*.

“Will they follow, Martin?” cried Jennifer.

She was sitting in the stern sheets with him; her hand was tight in his, and she was glad, exultantly, almost madly full of joy.

“No,” he cried. “They’ll funk it. Also they’ll have plenty more to attend to. Look!”

What was it she knew first—flame or sound? Perhaps both came at once. Against the jet black of the jungle a fat balloon of blinding flame suddenly leaped upward from the very heart of the dago ship, and with it, part of it, an appalling crash. Jennifer saw smoke, confusion, more flame, and then was aware that their engine was running hard and that they had gone tearing on a terrific curve into the main stream.

The Brute

At once the *Donna Diaba* was blotted out. At once Martin shut off the telltale motor. They sped on their own impetus with the pull of the tide drawing them through the shadows towards the sea.

“That was the motor going up, Jennifer,” he said to her. “That puts the *Donna Diaba* out of business, anyhow.”

“And the men of the *Donna Diaba*, Martin?” asked the girl.

“Here they are! Listen to them!”

Two boats were coming pounding up the river. The men in them, straining at the oars, were also shouting wildly and excitedly. Jennifer could even hear those who had gone through the jungle shouting and firing.

“Keeping up their courage,” Martin said. “That big bang gave them a shock, especially after they found the *Evelyn Hope* gone.”

The boats came by them, thrashing and churning up the water. In the bows men crouched with pistols ready for instant battle. But they were looking ahead, and in any case they could not pierce the shadows into which Martin had drawn the boat.

He watched them by, watched them round a bend. Then he opened out and took the centre of the river.

They heard the shouting stop behind them, then break out in a wild renewal.

“They’ve heard us,” Martin said. “They may come after us. But they won’t catch us now—and they won’t risk coming out to sea.”

That was true enough. The boats did turn and

“All Things Betray Thee”

come thrashing after, even one or two shots followed them, but they were not caught. Through the dead walls of jungle they sped, and out into the thrust and kick of the open sea.

In the moonlight out to sea they saw the *Evelyn Hope* riding; a thing of grace, exquisite and proud under the silvering of the moon.

“She’s a lovely thing,” said Jennifer, a laugh in her throat. “But I’m beginning to love—everything.”

“I believe you loved even that fight, Jennifer,” Sondes remarked.

“I know I did!” she cried. “I felt a positive primitive joy.”

“Beware,” he laughed. “You’re in danger of becoming an impossible brute.”

“What a little fool I have been!” she said. “But I am learning—I’m learning how not to be an impossible superior person.”

CHAPTER XII

JUNGLE DARKNESS

THEY were elated and happy when they reached the side of the schooner and Martin caught the rope the mate threw down to them. It seemed to both of them that all misunderstanding between them had been swept away. They were in complete accord. Indeed they had gone beyond that and had reached a state of satisfaction in each other that touched the supreme point of happiness. The world was a fine old place after all, everyone was friendly and staunch in it, if one could only get to know them properly.

Their condition was a dangerous one, they ought to have been warned by the swiftness and completeness of their happiness that it was far too good to be true, and that when the high gods make one drunk with such heady emotions they have to be paid for in suffering. The gods, indeed, had for the moment made them deliciously mad, but the gods had also provided the bitter antidote to that madness in the person of Liliás Seyler.

Liliás bitter, angry and half in love with Martin Sondes, watched the tenderness with which Martin handed Jennifer up the side with a spirit that rankled. All that was wicked in her was uppermost. She could have struck down the pair, killed them will-

Jungle Darkness

ingly. And if she did not do that it was not because she feared the consequences, but because she felt she could deal a more painful hurt.

She was certain she had made a discovery. She was certain she could hurt. And she meant to hurt—not so much Jennifer, as this big brute of a man who had scorned her.

She stood by the little crowd listening to their joyous exclamations as Jennifer and Martin told how the *Donna Diaba* had been put out of action, how their pursuers had been rendered helpless for many days. She heard Bevis cry: “But this is splendid. We’ve thrown them and their threat off. It is straight ahead and a clear road now.”

That was her cue. She struck. She said in her slow, clear, mocking voice: “It is glorious. Straight ahead for Fogasta and the rescue of Ralph Felton. We’re sure of success now.”

She said the name, Ralph Felton, deliberately, but it passed with her companions. They were too full of joy to notice the slip. And she did not bother about them. She was watching Martin Sondes to see if that name hit—and with a little thrill of joy she saw that it did.

He stiffened. His face was for an instant astonished and then it became ugly. He shot a look at Jennifer that was both hurt and angry. Then his jaw clenched, and with a gigantic effort he pulled himself together.

But Liliás had seen, and she laughed within herself. So her intuitions had been right. That curious

The Brute

parallel of man-hunting was not a parallel after all, but the same hunt with a difference. Certainly with a difference. Martin Sondes was hunting and harrying a wretch who had done evil things—and that man was Ralph Felton. Jennifer Daun was after a man who had hunted and harried Ralph Felton—and that man must be Martin Sondes. After all she had been almost certain of that before Martin had given himself away at her utterance of Ralph's name. This hunting business had been too coincidental, and then she had already proved the matter by asking Martin Sondes about Tampica and San Illara. She knew well those critical dates in Ralph Felton's encounters with the man who hunted him had been at just those times and places—Jennifer had let her read Ralph's letters. Also she knew that whatever Jennifer thought of him, Ralph had the reputation of being rather a bad-hat. Martin Sondes had been on the spot at those dates, so there was no doubt at all that he was the man who hunted Ralph. No doubt either that he was the man Jennifer had sworn to hunt for the sake of Ralph. Liliias laughed at the certainty of it.

She laughed when Martin Sondes cut her off from the group descending to the saloon, drew her aside with a grip on her arm that was painful.

“You said Ralph Felton,” he whispered harshly.

“Did I?” she cried in pretended alarm. “Surely I didn't!”

“Don't lie. It was Ralph Felton. Is that Ronald Buckingham's real name?”

Jungle Darkness

“Oh!” she breathed. “I shouldn’t have said it. . . . In the excitement it slipped out. You mustn’t tell, Captain, you mustn’t. . . .”

“Is that man’s name Ralph Felton?” his voice was ruthless.

“You know I can’t tell you,” she said. “I’ve promised. We know him as Ronald Buckingham. That was the name he took after some trouble—at San Illara. You mustn’t take advantage of my slip, Captain.”

“It *is* Ralph Felton,” he said hoarsely. “By God—*that* fellow!”

“I haven’t told you,” she breathed.

“You’ve told me,” he said grimly.

“And if—if I have, what does it mean to you?” she said softly.

He stared at her for a full minute, his face like granite, his eyes glittering with a cold fire. Then he put her arm away from him as though it stung him.

“Thank God, the devil isn’t a woman,” he said thickly, “there’d be no hope for the world then.”

He turned and went forward into the night.

CHAPTER XIII

TRICKERY

ALL night long Martin Sondes tramped the deck. Bevis Probyn below heard him in moments of wakefulness and wondered what there was to worry him now that all was smooth sailing. Paul Glen, who had recognized the intimacy, the camaraderie of Jennifer and Martin as they came aboard and was a little miserable and wakeful in consequence, cursed him for a noisy, thoughtless brute. Jennifer sleeping contentedly with dreams rather delicious did not hear those savage, steady footfalls. But Liliás heard and smiled and was satisfied.

She knew that Martin Sondes was walking the deck in a fury, and she was right. He was striding the deck in a passion of unreasoning rage.

He had been tricked. They had tricked him—*she* had fooled him. He almost hated Jennifer in his swing-back from sheer happiness that had gone before Liliás's revelation. He concentrated his anger on her.

She had fooled him, played with him, tricked him. . . . Of course she had. Why else had she hidden that fellow's name? What other reason was there for passing Ralph Felton off as Ronald Buckingham? She knew. If she didn't know definitely that Ralph

Trickery

Felton was the man he had sworn to punish, she knew at least that Ralph Felton was a creature no decent man would lift a hand to save.

Of course she knew. Raging and looking back on Ralph Felton's infamies, he told himself that it was impossible for her to be ignorant.

That cur—merely thinking of him made his gorge rise. Ralph Felton was unmitigated devil, there wasn't a clean, straight, manly fibre in his whole make-up.

That piece of blackguardism among the hospitable Indians—that was the man all through. Only there were things worse than that in the career of this drunkard, debauché and thief . . . a mean, slimy thief who would steal anything from a handful of milreis to a woman's honour.

He was a born wrong-'un. Why, their very first encounter had proved that!

Martin had got Felton out of a dago row—the old hand helping the tenderfoot fresh from home. It had been an ignoble business, a mean affair, but greenhorns weren't always wise. Martin had plucked him out of the scrape. He recalled how he had instinctively disliked Felton because of the sloppiness of his gratitude, too fulsome, too servile by far. Still, he had made allowances for the rawness of the boy. He had thought that, with a chance to make good, he would stiffen up.

He had taken him under his own wing, given him the shore-end of his own trading work at Belem. He had done more than that. He had seen him com-

The Brute

fortably housed in the home of some particular friends, the Eloendros.

The Eloendros, he had felt, would do the boy good. They were fine people, courtly, noble-minded, generous, hospitable. Ralph Felton had every chance of proving the stuff in him in his office and with the Eloendros. And yet when Martin returned to Belem after a single long trip there was his own office safe rifled even down to the stamp box, while the Eloendros had been stripped of everything of portable value, and worse—Juanita Eloendros, the soft and trusting Juanita who was no more than a child, was weeping her eyes out in privacy, and with good reason. And Ralph Felton, the author of all this vile-ness, had vanished.

That was the man. That was how he responded to trust and friendship—and love. And that wasn't the only index to his character either. There were a dozen more villainies, all of the same stamp.

At Tampica he had used Martin's name to ingratiate himself with Martin's friends. He had deliberately selected the richest and ripest of those friends for his ugly plans. Mesurar, that splendid old hidalgo, had accepted him with open hands, made him mayordomo. Felton had jumped at such an opportunity for stripping an unsuspecting man of his valuables. There had also been Mesurar's niece. How was it such a cur had such a beastly power over women? Luckily Martin, hot on his scent, had sailed into Tampica before the brute was ready for his complete haul. He had bolted from Tampica at the sight

Trickery

of the *Evelyn Hope's* topsails, and with him had gone the niece, for her jewels were extensive and rich.

What woe would not have descended upon the Mesurars if Martin had not come to Tampica deliberately to hunt that beast down! As it was Ralph Felton had got away with the jewels. He was not the man to toss them aside into a filthy Indian village or dago slum, as he would have tossed the girl if the pursuit had not been too hot for him. The girl was saved, but—well, there was a wound in a fine friendship with the Mesurars after that.

Felton, naturally, cared not a rap about that side. He was utterly devoid of decency. There was not a spark of any warming virtue in him. He was a snake who thought only of his own gratifications, and would wriggle through any slime to satisfy them. Well, the only way to deal with a snake was to go after it.

Martin had done that ceaselessly, consistently. He had made a point of following any trail that pointed toward Ralph Felton. He had scared him out of many places. He had arrived in time to disturb many villainies. He had kept the fellow on the run, anyhow, if the brute had been too slippery to allow himself to be caught. . . . That was what the precious scoundrel had meant when he had written to Jennifer Daun to say that he could never settle in one place to make his fortune for the vengeful man who had hounded him forever on. . . . The half-lies of a beast, how true they were when one knew. He had hounded the cur, had meant to get him. . .

And it was true that Ralph Felton was in danger

The Brute

of death at Martin's hands. . . . Very true. At San Illara in November of 1919, that nearly happened.

He had heard of Ralph's being there and had come up with him by an overland march. He had cornered the fellow all right then. In a filthy little thieves' posada they had fought it out. Felton had tried to shoot him, but he had meant to finish it with bare hands. He had disarmed the chap. He had fought him. He had mauled Felton badly. The fellow had pretended to collapse—the trick of a fox. When Martin had turned his back, given orders that the police were to be called, Felton was up quickly enough, and the knife he had snatched went into Martin's back with plenty of power. He had meant to kill. It was a miracle that he had not succeeded. He had put Martin on the sick list for months, and had escaped. . . . To Fogasta, no doubt, where, under the name of Ronald Buckingham, he had perpetrated what other villainies!

Was that a lie too? Another part of the trick to fool him? Was that story of his imprisonment in Fogasta as false as the rest of Ralph Felton's life? Dawn found him stamping back and forth, asking that question again and again. Had he been tricked into pledging himself to rescue Ralph Felton from the consequences of another infamy?

He failed to notice the glory of the tropic dawn, failed to see Jennifer standing by the rail drinking in the blue and gold, the flashing aquamarine and topaz of sky and sea. Failed to see her standing

Trickery

there slim, resilient, radiant in her happiness until she spoke to him, wished him good morning in the happy tones with which she had wished him good night.

The sound of her voice was like a blow. He halted in his tracks—stared. His clouded and furious eyes took in the loveliness of her radiant morning air. The sense of sheer happiness that transfigured even her beauty was like a knife stab. He hated her—hated her. With a look that made her gasp he swung on his heel, and left her standing there shocked and bewildered.

He did not join them at breakfast. He avoided them all when he came on deck for a brief spell later. At lunch they learnt that he was having his meals in his cabin. Jennifer, hurt, bewildered, but not able to believe that the man of last night could have changed so completely into the man he seemed to be today, twitted him on this, on his wish to avoid them.

“I do as I choose, Miss Daun,” he said harshly, turning from her.

Miss Daun! And last night she had been Jennifer.

She said chilled, proud, hurt: “Are you saying that our company is distasteful to you, Mr. Sondes?”

“I am saying that,” he said, and he left Jennifer gasping, shocked to the verge of tears, staring after him, and Paul Glen, leaning on the rail by her side, stiffening and saying furiously: “He *is* an utter cad, that fellow. There’s no curing him.”

Lilias smiled in her slow way. How well Martin

The Brute

Sondes had reacted to her plan, and how bewildered the others were. Her instinct for antagonism was being satisfied. . . . And how she wanted to hurt that man, too. She said in her mocking voice: "You can't cure a natural instinct, Paul; our cave man is merely reverting to his habitual brutality."

"But—last night!" Jennifer almost wailed.

"He was charming and almost human," sneered Liliás. "But in the morning comes wisdom. He is obviously furious with himself for having allowed a romantic circumstance and a little moonlight to weaken him."

"But that's ridiculous," cried Jennifer.

"My dear, isn't that type usually ridiculous? That sort of Samson thinks every woman a Delilah."

"You're talking nonsense," exclaimed Jennifer, feeling that, if Liliás was right, her own curiously intimate reading of the fineness of Martin's character was wrong—horribly wrong.

"You know best, my dear," smiled Liliás. "It may, after all, merely be his style of love-making. Harshness after tenderness is considered irresistible by his type."

"You're also disgusting," said Jennifer.

"Is there any other explanation for the violent change in him?" asked Liliás, enjoying the thrill of knowing that she alone could explain that change. Enjoying, too, the mystification of Jennifer who left her angrily. And Paul, who didn't feel mystified at all, was just as amusing.

"No need for any sort of explanation," he said

Trickery

pompously. "The fellow is just a natural bounder. But he'll have to look out. He's going just a bit too far."

Lilias did not miss her chance.

"I agree with you, Paul," she said, with soft seriousness. "I am really growing anxious, and I can't tell you how grateful I am that we have you to fall back on."

"I shall not fail you, Lilias," he said, "though it is a beastly position, as I see it. We can't really do without this fellow, and Bevis is more than half on his side. Still, we're not going to stand much more of this sort of thing. If that chap can't react to decent conduct, then I'll have to teach him by the only method he understands—brute force."

Paul Glen stood frowning, his big fists clenched. He really did think he could do it, just as he really was outraged by what he thought was Martin Sondes's brutality. A nice boy Paul, a nice, straight boy, but almost too easily misled.

Curiously Martin Sondes himself was wondering at that moment whether he had been too easily misled by the barbed hints of a spiteful woman.

That early morning meeting with Jennifer had had, after all, an effect on him. The picture of her, lovely, happy, candid-eyed, was ineffacable. Her clear, straightforward friendliness had been beyond artifices. She could not be plotting against him, tricking him. . . . She couldn't *know* what Ralph Felton meant to him.

He saw that decisively now as he stood in his cabin,

The Brute

forearms resting along the port, and brooding eyes staring out to the mysterious tangle of jungle away over the sea. It was as though the sight of Jennifer had cleared away his passions, brought back his common sense.

A girl like that could not be underhanded, he felt in his heart. And admitting that much, his cleared mind told him that he had been a fool even to think it. Yes, a fool. Why, if she had known who he was, even guessed at it, would she be so stupid as to lead him straight to the man he had sworn to punish? Of course she did not know, logic and his knowledge of her fine nature told him so.

What a fool he had been to swing off into blind rage. . . . But still, was it so foolish?

After all why had she hidden the name? Why call him Ronald Buckingham when his name was Ralph Felton? A matter to make one go slow, not easily explainable. Did it mean that she felt that Ralph Felton wouldn't be the type of man he would care to rescue? Did it mean that she knew the type of black-guard Felton was? It looked like it. What other explanation could there be? She might want to protect Felton, keep the meaning of their expedition hidden—but surely not from him? Not from him, unless she feared to tell him. And if she feared to tell him that meant she did not know what a cur Felton was.

But somehow he couldn't believe that. He couldn't see a girl like her behaving as she did if she knew the sort of monster Felton was. A girl like Jennifer would know shame, even if she was determined to

Trickery

rescue the man, if she knew what sort of man Felton was. . . . If she knew. No, she couldn't know. She couldn't bear to know, just as he couldn't bear her to know. The thing was too horrible to think of, much too horrible. No man or woman would dare to tell her. It would be unspeakable—the truth, when told to a girl like Jennifer. . . . He would not dare to tell her himself, or allow any other man to give her as much as a hint.

And yet, if she didn't know, why fob him off with a false name?

He couldn't understand that. Perhaps she had heard hints. . . . But no, it couldn't be that. If she had heard hints, soon she would have heard all. She knew nothing, he believed. The story she had told him about Buckingham was, as far as she knew, the full truth. . . .

But even then why hide his real name?

It was baffling. Baffling. He seemed only to exonerate Jennifer in order to convince himself that there must be something underhanded about her actions. His mind still hung, indecisive, when the mate came to his cabin, thinking he was asleep, and spoke to him words that sent him back to the port to see what he had been looking at unseeing. A broad river was opening out before them. They had made the Paranie, the river that led to Fogasta.

Fogasta . . . and his mind was yet undecided.

He could not even decide when Jennifer, her voice reserved and her face pale, spoke to him.

The Brute

"The mate tells me we shall reach Fogasta about midday tomorrow, Captain," she said.

"That is so."

"And we have not settled on a plan of action."

"No," he answered, "nothing is settled yet."

"Then we must discuss things."

"No," he said, "not yet. I have to decide first."

He was speaking half to himself. The casualness of his tone angered the girl.

"Captain Sondes," she cried, "I do not understand your new attitude. I think some explanation is necessary."

He stared down at her. She was very lovely, far too lovely. . . . And yet she had lied about Ralph Felton's name.

"I'll talk when I've decided what I shall do," he said grimly.

Anger flamed out in her eyes. "I will not be treated in this way!" she cried.

He shrugged his shoulders and moved off. Paul Glen, his eyes blazing, moved in front of him.

"Dammit, you'd better behave in a civil manner, understand? You're going too far, my man," he cried.

"And if I don't?" said Martin, looking at him level-eyed.

"Then you'll be taught how to," snarled Paul.

"I'll remember it," said Martin, and went along the deck.

CHAPTER XIV

HUNTER AND RESCUER

JENNIFER had lied about Felton's real name. That meant she knew that Felton was a cur—or there was some other explanation. And only one person could give it to Martin in the present conditions of things—Lilias Seyler.

He went straight to her after dinner, in the soft light of the evening. She saw him coming, drifted before him until she had put the deck-house effectively between them and the others. She meant to play with him, as she always played with men, but he was not the playing sort.

He said curtly: "I want to speak with you, Miss Seyler."

"And about what?" she asked with her slow, provoking smile.

"We won't make a comedy of it," he said. "You know exactly what I mean."

"You are refreshingly direct," she said, looking at him with half-veiled eyes. "Perhaps you'll put the question direct now."

"I want the truth about this Ralph Felton business!"

"As simple as that," she mocked. "You come stamping up to me in your best quarter-deck manner

The Brute

and insist that I should do no less than betray the confidence of my friends."

"We are past the opening moves," he said, and she did not forgive him for it. "You have done that already—deliberately."

"Deliberately?" her eyebrows went up.

"No need for pretence."

"Every need," she mocked. "In the world I come from diplomacy is the spice of existence. I am not going to risk my comforting friendships for an unfortunate slip."

"Very well, then, I must go to Miss Daun."

She laughed softly: "Captain Sondes, am I as stupid as all that?"

"More diplomacy?"

"Crude bluffing, merely. You try to frighten me with threats of Jennifer. . . . My dear man, if you thought it would answer, you would have gone to her first."

He stared at her fiercely.

"Are you going to tell me?"

"In confidence—perhaps. I rather like you. . . . We have something in common, Martin. In confidence, I . . ."

"I don't pledge anything."

"I do—by telling you nothing."

"But I must know—don't you see that?"

"You shall, Martin—in confidence."

"You have my word. Now, does Miss Daun know the sort of scoundrel this half-brother of hers is?"

Hunter and Rescuer

“Frankly, I don’t know exactly what sort of scoundrel you mean.”

“An utter blackguard—the worst type.”

“She certainly doesn’t think him *that*.”

“You mean she knows he is something of a bad lot?”

“I don’t know,” she said softly.

“Then why hint?”

“Because I don’t know. I haven’t Jennifer’s confidence . . . but she *did* hide his real name, didn’t she?”

Lilias planted that subtle little dart with what she thought delicate skill. And she saw she had made a mistake. The poverty of her attack had given her away. He saw at once that none of them knew, Jennifer did not know the true character of Ralph Felton. . . . If Jennifer had known, this woman would have done her best to expose her. She was willing to wound—but had no weapons. . . . She did not know. Jennifer did not know. That was definite, then. He had cleared that lovely girl of treachery, then. By so much was he free of his problem.

Lilias saw by the lightening of his face that she had made a false step. Instead of entangling him deeper in a difficult problem, she had helped him out. She was chagrined, but she was not beaten. She had other shots in her locker. She fired one.

“So, after all, Ralph Felton is the man you have been hunting down.”

“I don’t answer that,” he said grimly.

“No need,” she said. “I have some common sense, you know. And it is an engaging situation. He is

The Brute

the man you are hunting to ruin, therefore you are also the man Jennifer has sworn to hunt, to ruin.”

He stiffened, startled, and she laughed in his face.

“Ah,” she cried, “so you didn’t look at that side? How extraordinary, you simple and direct men are! You’ve been so occupied with your thoughts of vengeance on Ralph Felton that you have no thought of the vengeance Jennifer has in store for you—when she learns who you are.”

“That means nothing,” he said, trying to keep his voice even, “for she does not realize the character of her brother.”

“And does that mean anything either, my dear, blundering Martin?”

“Why fence? A cur is a cur, and a decent girl. . . .”

“Doesn’t always believe in it in her half-brother. Do you think *you* could convince Jennifer that Ralph Felton is a ruffian, Martin?”

Martin stared at her. He was mum for a moment—well, she *had* rather cornered him.

“There’s no getting away from the truth,” he said huskily.

“That’s a fallacy,” she mocked. “Half the people in the world get away from the truth by refusing to believe it. Do you think Jennifer will readily accept evil about her dear brother?”

“She can’t fight against facts,” said Martin heavily.

“Pah,” she scoffed, “you’re not even being truthful to yourself now. He’s her half-brother. He left her at an age when she adored him as an elder god. He

Hunter and Rescuer

writes the most plausible and affectionate letters, and those letters have already told her his version of the truth. She is already convinced by them. Do you think you can shake her belief?"

Martin could see the forces against him growing. He said lamely: "But the facts give his letters the lie."

"Facts," she scoffed. "Whose facts? Who can tell her the facts?"

"I could," he said with hesitation, and she laughed outright.

"*You!*" she said. "You who already figure in this business as the scoundrel, as the mean, lying and unscrupulous villain who is bent on ruining Ralph? . . . My dear Martin, you can't be such a fool. You know that every word you say is labelled 'perjured' even before you utter it. *Your* truth . . . why it will be your condemnation in her eyes."

He stood with hands clenched on the rail, face pale and bitter.

"She *must* believe me!" he persisted.

"Go to her now and tell—and see!" she whispered hotly. He did not move. Her eyes rested on the strength of his face and the pain in it. She put out her hand, rested it softly on his arm.

"But you *can't* go to her and tell her, Martin," she said softly. "It isn't in you. You can't shock her with foul things. You can't desecrate her idol, blacken the character of one she loves—even if you would be believed. You can't strike that blow in the

The Brute

face. . . . You are a strong, forceful, ruthless creature, Martin, but you can't do *that*."

He stood rooted to the deck. He knew she was right. Yesterday he might have told Jennifer straight and scorned the consequence—today, no. He couldn't strike that blow in the face. He couldn't hurt Jennifer. More—more faintly, but all things helped his indecision—he couldn't hurt himself in the eyes of Jennifer. What could he do?

Lilias close to him, alluring, lovely, murmured:

"A pretty problem, isn't it, Martin? You have given your sacred word to rescue a man you would rather see rot in prison. You *will* rescue him. And, when you do it, he will expose you to Jennifer as the man who has hunted him to ruin—and she will loathe you forever. A pretty problem."

He looked into her eyes.

"What are you?" he asked. "A woman or a devil, that you should take pleasure in such a situation?"

The grim strength of his face, the passion against her in it seemed to fire her with a defiance that was reckless.

"The sort of devil a woman becomes when her love is treated with contempt, Martin," she said fiercely, and he knew that she spoke true.

He stood back from her.

"I think we'd better end this talk."

"You don't believe me," she said thickly. "You don't think I mean that—love."

"Love," he said stiffly. "You must not talk like that, Miss Seyler."

Hunter and Rescuer

"I have to," she whispered fiercely. "Can't you see I'm truthful *now*, Martin?"

"I don't think you quite realize what you are saying," he said.

"I know," she whispered. "It's captured me. . . . Just now I didn't know, but now—yes. . . . Absurd. It's absurd—but it's there."

She stood before him, arms suddenly flung out, her rich and superb figure proud in its line and beauty before him.

"Martin," she breathed, "Martin. . . . Don't you see? Am I not worth a dozen pretty milk-and-water misses? Martin, won't you see?"

"Please, Miss Seyler," he said quietly, "you are allowing excitement to run away with you."

"Let it run away with *you*," she breathed. He made to go; she held his arm. "The primitive savage deep in me calls to the primitive nature in you. . . . Let it answer. We're affinities. We're made for each other. Don't you feel it? Don't you thrill to it? Made for each other. . . . And I can fight like a primitive, too; fight with you, at your shoulder . . . but for you too. I'll fight—fight rather than let a pretty drawing-room chit capture you! Don't you understand, Martin, it is the elemental woman in me calling to you—demanding you?"

For a moment she clung to him, fiercely, savagely. She saw the rugged sternness of his face soften a little—but not weaken. He said with startling gentleness:

"You do me too great an honour, Miss Seyler."

The Brute

Gently he tried to loosen her hold. Already she was knowing fury.

“Martin,” she cried harshly, “do you realize what I am offering you?”

“Yes,” he answered quietly. “I am sorry. You do me too great an honour. You will see it yourself later.”

Her passion was transformed into hate. She flung from him with such fury that she reeled across the taffrail.

“So that is it. . . . Not good enough. . . . A low, coarse brute like. . . .”

Someone was coming towards them quickly, some one who had misread her fall across the rail. She saw it was Paul. She saw in Paul her chance of punishing this man who had repulsed her. She screamed out: “Paul! Paul! This brute—protect me!”

Paul came running, hands swinging.

Jennifer and Bevis appeared, running, round the deck-house. Jennifer cried: “Paul! Paul!”

“This cad,” raged Paul, “insulted Liliias before my eyes.”

He swung viciously at Martin. He struck to knock down. His left stabbed at the head, the right at the chin. Martin’s hands moved up with quick but casual certainty. The blows were blocked, picked off in the air. Martin took his man on the forearms, threw him back against the rail. The coolness of it, the sureness should have warned Paul. He was beyond warning. Jennifer called again, but

Hunter and Rescuer

already he was in, both hands chopping to the body.

He knew how to hit. Good training and the full impact of the body was behind those blows. The cur would wring when they landed. They did not land. Strong arms came down smothering the blows. A twist and Paul was locked in a clinch he could not break. And Martin Sondes was talking to him very calmly: "You're being a fool," he said. "Stop all this. Clear out."

Paul with a mighty output of strength wrenched clear.

"Not before I've given you the biggest thrashing of your life," he panted, and he drove at the cheek.

Martin, with his guard down, took a glancing blow. He shook his head as though stung. His body crouched. His left lifted and stabbed. . . . Paul was on his back in the scuppers.

Jennifer came forward quickly.

"Paul! Captain Sondes! This must stop at once," she cried.

"Not now," said Martin quietly. "He has a lesson to learn. It had better be now. He's been spoiling for this."

Paul was on his feet.

"Go away, Jennifer," he cried, "I am going to settle with this brute once and for all."

He measured his man and went in. He was fighting with caution now. That digging, driving punch had taught him something. He'd have to pit science against that punch to beat this rough-hewn scalawag. Luckily he had science. He went in dancing quickly,

The Brute

body poised ready to slip anything Martin sent across, right feinting. He did all the right things. The flash of the feint, the whiplash left that it masked, were masterly. Good work, neat work, Paul's trainers would have applauded. . . . The head the left should have found was not there. A stanchion seemed to flick out of the blue to crash on his jaw. . . . He was again on his back in the scuppers.

He rose to his feet. His head was foggy and whirling. He could not believe that it was Sondes standing there before him, four-square and calm as though nothing had happened to disturb a maiden meditation. Men did not maintain that attitude when a boxer of his gifts went into action. It made him angry. He saw red. He dived for the big man's belt line, hurled in with fists hammering to fight on the inside. He got inside. All the lower guard of his man was before him to jolt and jab with half-arm smashes as he pleased. His arms bunched to kick in. . . .

He was on his back in the scuppers once more.

Just a swing of Martin Sondes's body, the quick, liling movement as the feet shifted weight, then the punch had torn in. A seven-inch shift, no more—but every ounce of the captain's two hundred pounds was packed into it, and it had been timed to a fraction.

Paul Glen lay for more than the count of ten before climbing groggily to his feet. Martin Sondes waited in unflurried calm. Paul lurched forward feeling for clinch. Martin side-stepped out of distance.

Hunter and Rescuer

Paul lashed his right to the man's head, whipped his left across to find the jaw. Martin's left touched the forearm, the blow was nullified. Martin's head moved a fraction, the jaw did not accommodate the punch. Martin's left hooked—Paul was on his back in the scuppers.

He remained there, staring with dazed eyes at Martin. The captain, grim and unperturbed, looked down at him. There was neither triumph nor malice in that glance, nor was there pity.

“You cur!” Paul growled through thickened lips. “You low, cowardly cur!”

“Better say it on your feet,” said Martin. His right hand went out, Paul was yanked upright with one quick, effortless snatch. The power of that was the final touch of defeat. With knees shaking, and heart sick with pain and fear, Paul crouched against the rail.

“Go on with your remarks,” said Martin in an inflexible voice.

“I think that is enough, Captain Sondes,” said Jennifer shakily. “The man is beaten.”

Martin ignored her. He was staring coldly at Paul, waiting, inviting the young man to speak. He gave him a full half minute, then:

“It is the custom in these seas to break a man thoroughly when he acts as you acted just now, Glen. I'm ready to do it. I'm ready to give you a battering that will keep you in your bunk for a week, for you want your lesson. You have to learn that a man is master here by his own strength and right, and for

The Brute

his own good—and yours. You understand me, I am willing to deal with you without mercy, and next time, if there should be a next time, I won't hold my hand. Pretty manners and conventions will not save you. You understand? I am master here."

"Not to the extent of insulting women," said Paul thickly, and Martin's brows drew down, and he stepped forward.

"Go ahead," cried Paul. "Batter me stiff if you like, but as long as I have any manhood in me I shall do my best to stop the sort of thing you did to Miss Seyler just now."

It looked as though Martin would strike again. But even as his fist swung the meaning of Paul's words seemed to penetrate. He stared surprise. Dropped his hands. Liliias, for all her anger at him, smiled. She knew her man. The mere suggestion that he had done anything to her was an insult, but she knew that so strong was the vein of chivalry in him that he would never excuse himself at her expense. She was safe with him, he would not even correct Paul, for that might touch her. And she was right. The light died from Martin's eyes. He said, simply:

"You'll have to learn a good deal before you are effective then, Glen."

Liliias almost laughed. What fools these simple, chivalrous men were. Here was Martin Sondes saddling himself with further unpopularity simply because he would not expose her. While men were so stupid, women like her would always triumph. . . .

Hunter and Rescuer

But suddenly she stopped smiling. Jennifer was speaking. Jennifer was saying in her clear voice:

“You are wrong, Paul. Captain Sondes did not insult Liliás.”

“But—but I heard—saw—she called,” he answered gaping.

“Nevertheless, Captain Sondes did not insult her. You may take my word for that.”

“But, Jennifer—really—”

“I am telling you the truth.” Paul gazed bewildered from Jennifer to Martin Sondes, and on to Liliás. She said mockingly:

“I certainly called, Paul.”

Jennifer’s face became set and resolute.

“Captain Sondes did not insult her, Paul. On the contrary he was treating her with the greatest courtesy,” she persisted evenly.

“After all,” said Liliás, angry and maybe a little afraid, “perhaps I was in a better position to judge.”

“I can judge, too,” said Jennifer coldly. “I heard. Bevis, here, heard.”

Paul looked at Bevis, and Bevis nodded agreement. Liliás said furiously: “You heard only what you wanted to hear.” She was wondering how much the girl had overheard.

“I can repeat what we heard,” said Jennifer with firmness. “It began with something about affinities—every word was clear after that. Shall I go on?”

Liliás shrugged her shoulders.

“One is always at a disadvantage with eavesdroppers,” she sneered. She walked to Paul, put her arm

The Brute

about his shoulders to help him from the deck. She would make a good exit anyhow. "Come on, Paul," she said, "we are in an unpopular minority."

Paul slipped gently from her arm, looked at her with understanding eyes. Then he turned to Martin Sondes.

"I've been a bit of a damned ass, Sondes," he said. "I apologize."

He went to his cabin alone.

CHAPTER XV

THE TANGLE

MARTIN SONDES spent the worst ten minutes of the voyage when Paul and Bevis and Liliás had left.

Jennifer stayed with him. Jennifer would not let him go. Jennifer was determined to have things out. And as he watched her, beautiful, nymph-like before him, he knew that she could not have it out. He couldn't tell her anything. Could he tell her the true character of Ralph Felton? No. Tell her who he himself was? No. Tell her that he could not go on with the voyage? No—that would force him to tell her the other untellable things. He could do nothing. His hands were hopelessly tied.

She came to the point at once:

“What is the trouble, Martin?”

“What do you mean, Miss Daun?” was all he could say, and that was symptomatic of his condition.

“That is part of it,” she said with a quiet smile. “I was Jennifer last night, and I am calling you, Martin.”

Jennifer! Martin! That only made things a thousand times worse. He stood before her wondering what he should say.

“Do I have to demand plain speaking from you?” she smiled. “Is it Liliás?”

The Brute

It wasn't Liliias, not the real trouble. He might admit it was. . . . But no, that would lead to the reason, and the reason could not be given to her. But Liliias—what had happened gave him his cue. He might slip out of his promise that way.

“Call it the general friction that has existed from the first,” he said in as harsh a voice as he could. “That—just now—was the thing coming to a head. It was bound to happen. It has been an ill-advised companionship from the first. I ought to have seen that I wasn't the man to fit in with you.”

She stared, puzzled.

“What do you mean me to understand by that?”

“Surely it is obvious. This sort of thing is doomed to go on happening while a man like me is in contact with people of your sort. There is no chance of harmony between us.”

She moved so that the light of the moon, which had risen, should reveal his face to her.

“Are you asking to be released from your contract?” she demanded amazed.

“I think it would be best for all,” he said thickly.

“You're not serious?” she gasped.

Not serious, he could have laughed outright.

“I was never more serious, Jennifer,” he said as evenly as possible.

“It is unthinkable.”

“Nevertheless I suggest that you release me.”

“But can't you see—that's impossible. Even if there was to be further friction. . . . But there won't

The Tangle

be, Martin. We'll get rid of Lilius Seyler, Paul, if necessary, at Fogasta. . . . We *must* go on now."

"Even that—" he began desperately, but she took him up shrewdly.

"To cry off because of a little friction, that decidedly is not like you, Martin. I don't believe it. There's something more behind that."

Something more behind it—again he wanted to laugh grimly. If she only knew. But she must not know. He must keep up his end, lie like the deuce if necessary.

"There is nothing more behind it," he said. "I just don't want to go on."

She stared at him.

"And for no reason—save it is distasteful to you."

"That is so," he said, not daring to look at her.

She drew her breath quickly, it was almost a sob. She turned to lean on the rail to hide her face. Presently she said in a strained voice:

"I do not understand why you have so suddenly changed your mind. I suppose I have no right to inquire. Still I have a right to insist that we are not left helpless. We must have someone of your capacity to carry us through. Are we likely to get anybody else?"

Martin Sondes knew that he was cornered.

"You mean in Fogasta?"

"In Fogasta or anywhere where such a man could be found quickly. Is there likelihood of getting a substitute?"

"We could try," he said lamely.

The Brute

“That is only temporizing. Do *you* think we could find a man and at once?”

“No,” he said, almost in despair.

“Do you think we can carry out the rescue of my half-brother without such a man?”

“No.”

“Do you think it would be safe for us, even, to go alone? Will we be able to avoid danger?”

Again he answered: “No.”

She faced him squarely.

“You agree then that it is impossible to release you?”

“You could give up the idea,” he said desperately.

She drew herself up, stared in amazement.

“That is utterly out of the question,” she cried. “You know that. It is a sacred duty I owe my brother. And since we go on. . . .”

And since they went on, since *she* went on, he would have to go too. He could not let her walk blindly into danger. He knew the dangers. There would be numberless dagos only too ready to go to any extreme to get possession of that seven thousand pounds. There was risk before them in Fogasta when the citizens of that predatory land smelt the money out. There was risk coming up behind as fast as the lamed *Donna Diaba* could carry Cipriano, Pascobas and Gonzala. There was risk to Jennifer’s person, as a woman rich for ransom. There were risks when they tried to bribe Ralph Felton out of jail, risks of men, risks of disease. He saw that circumstances had him tight. He must be there to protect her. She said:

The Tangle

“And since we must go on we must hold you to your word.”

He bowed acceptance, curtly.

“Very well,” he said, “I will go with you.”

He would go on. The thing was written. He would rescue a man he would rather keep in jail. He would be defamed by that man and Jennifer would hate him. But fate had ruled it so. He had given his word. And he must protect Jennifer. He was beginning to see clearly that, whatever the hurt to himself, he must protect Jennifer.

CHAPTER XVI

TIED HANDS

HAVING made his choice, Martin Sondes was more himself on the long run up the golden river to Fogasta, but at that little rambling town he was tedious. That is, Liliás Seyler decided he was tedious and also overbearing.

He asked his passengers to show themselves as little as possible—he and his mate and his white hands made short work of the fruit and vegetable sellers who came out to the schooner, so that they were soon left alone by the boatmen. Finally, though, he went ashore himself with one of the English hands, and made a point of asking the others not to follow him.

“He is treating us like a pack of school children,” said Liliás bitterly.

“He probably knows his business,” said Paul coldly. “It’s undoubtedly for our own good.”

“Oh, you’ve gone over to the enemy, too,” she scoffed. “Well, I’m still a free subject. I like seeing new towns and I have some shopping to do also.”

“I think it would be wiser to obey Captain Sondes,” said Jennifer.

“I owe obedience to nobody,” said Liliás.

“In any case,” said Bevis quietly, “you can’t get ashore. There are no boats coming off.”

In this he had reckoned without Liliás. When the

Tied Hands

American mate came to them after lunch, they realized that the headache that had kept Liliás from the table was a subterfuge. She had apparently bribed two of the deck hands to row her to the quays.

She was away no more than an hour, and they were glad she returned before Martin. She came up the side with a handful of parcels, and her usual calm defiance in her face.

“An unpleasant little town,” she said. “Martin Sondes could best have kept me away from it by speaking of its manifest detractions. As it is he was wrong in suggesting it had lethal qualities. I have not been murdered or robbed, as you see, I don’t even think I was swindled.”

“I don’t think Martin Sondes was thinking of the individual,” said Bevis Probyn curtly. And he was right. When Martin returned half an hour later he came straight to them, eyed them grimly and said:

“One of you went ashore?”

There was silence for a moment then Liliás said with her slow laugh:

“I went ashore.”

“I forbade it.”

“I am not one of your crew,” she said. “You have no control over my personal liberty, Captain Sondes.”

“And you also enjoyed defying me,” he said evenly. “Well, thanks to that, Miss Seyler, the authorities have arranged to arrest us when we dock tomorrow.”

There was dead silence and Martin, after letting his words sink in, went on.

“But before that—tonight in fact—we are due to

The Brute

have our throats cut and our strong-room looted by the choicest ruffians of Fogasta dockside. The enjoyment of your personal liberty has brought that, Miss Seyler. Are you proud of yourself?"

"You seem incapable of expressing yourself save in terms of melodrama," said Liliás in a bored voice. "Isn't all that out of proportion to an innocent stroll through a rather penny-plain little town?"

"You took two of my crew to row you ashore," said Martin Sondes, "though, if you had thought a minute, you would have noted that I had taken particular pains to keep my men from coming in contact with anybody from the town. Those men sat waiting for you in a quayside wine shop. And, being dagos, they talked. They talked of the millionaire English the schooner carried. They supported their romance of the fabulous riches you had with you by telling in detail how the arch-thieves Cipriano Bravo and Pascobas and Gonzala had tried to get them. They told that story, Miss Seyler, and interested persons on the quayside listened. And the news spread. When did you go for your innocent stroll? During lunch? by the end of the siesta, somewhere after three, all that those men had told was already being repeated in the Administration House. And the Administration was overjoyed. The members of that highly acquisitive body saw you in terms of fat loot, Miss Seyler, and they began to plan at once to get that booty."

"You talk as though this was the home government of the Forty Thieves," said Liliás with a hard smile.

Tied Hands

“It is much more modern and effective,” said Martin. “They will rob us with all the powers and subtleties of the law. We shall be arrested and held on some count—an offence against the emigrant or sanitary codes, perhaps, it will be easy to manufacture a cause. We shall be held, and by means of law costs, bribes, fines and what-not else they will take every milreis we have on us, and any they think we can get from home before they let us go. They have carried that sort of thing to a fine art in these parts, Miss Seyler.”

“And the attack tonight?” asked Jennifer.

“The whole waterside is talking of what the boatmen babbled. Every dockrat and quayside thief knows the story, for this is a land where even a whisper is winged. Every rogue in the slums knows that there are riches on board this schooner to be had for no more exertion than a knife thrust or two. And the thieves are not going to hesitate. You see they know their administrators and what will happen to us the moment we dock. They intend to forestall the government by acting tonight.”

“How do you know all this?” asked Jennifer.

“The friends I went to in Fogasta have ears for such whispers,” he said. “You have to be like that to survive in a land like this. Even while I was discussing plans with them, the news filtered in and I was warned.”

“That is pretty fortunate for us,” said Paul Glen in a friendly tone. “You’ll know what to do, Captain Sondes?”

The Brute

The two big men faced each other for a moment, Paul rather red, but looking at Martin, level. Then they both smiled. That was all. But they understood each other. Paul had got over his drawing-room manner and was now an ally.

“Yes, we will do our best to beat them,” said Martin, and his “we” included Paul. “That is why I made rather a public business of arranging to dock tomorrow at eight in the morning, when I might have done it tonight, or rather not at all. A race that lives for and by ‘tomorrow’ is not so hard to handle after all. The Administration will see no advantage in exerting unnecessary mental and physical effort until the time arranged.”

“And of course we don’t dock tomorrow?” said Bevis.

“We shall not even be here,” smiled Martin.

“But,” cried Jennifer quickly, “what about my half-brother, Ronald Buckingham?”

Martin’s face darkened, but he said with an affectation of ease:

“Ronald Buckingham is not in Fogasta—luckily, as things have turned out.”

“You—mean . . . you mean . . .” cried Jennifer breathlessly, “that something has happened to him?”

“Oh, no. He is quite well so far as my friends could say. He has been moved inland, that is all. He is in a place called Senzala, which is back of the plateau by the mouth of this river.”

“But we can reach him?”

“Yes, but the going will be exacting. We can’t use

Tied Hands

the post road now—the only easy way, because of the interest shown in us. The jungle trail will be heavy marching.”

“But we can get him out of prison?”

“In some ways it will be more easy, I think. But the road will be terrible.”

“The only thing that matters is rescuing him,” said Jennifer.

Martin Sondes nodded. It was no good fighting against fate now. He had to go on whatever it would mean to him—however much Jennifer was to hate him in the end.

Perhaps Martin Sondes had been disappointed when he heard that Buckingham—or Felton—was well. He did not quite know what he had hoped for—perhaps that the wretch had died as many did die in these dog-holes of Latin-American jails. But the man had not died. He wouldn't. His was the sly nature that found means to survive where better men succumbed. Again, he had not been imprisoned for any of those beastly acts that, at a pinch, might have spurred Martin to refuse to rescue him. Perhaps Martin had hoped for that, hoped that the story the man had sent Jennifer was as false as his life. But it was true. For once Felton had done a thing which was almost a virtue in Fogasta—he had been resisting tyranny as Jennifer had said. And had been taken for that. . . . Perhaps that meant he had turned over a new leaf. Martin hoped it was so, though his knowledge of the man forbade hope.

Martin told soberly what he had heard about Buck-

The Brute

ingham, and how their chances of getting him free had actually improved, taken that they could get safely to the little, heat-indolent town of the interior. There was no real Morro at Senzala, such as they saw towering above the painted patchwork town before them. The prison conditions in the old jail of Senzala were more casual, and they would probably be able to get their man out by a daring attack.

Also, when they had got him out, they could get away quickly and with a fair chance of safety through the bush and by another route. They could get down to a big river called the Rio d'Oro, and in canoes slip down to a port called San Anjo. The *Evelyn Hope* would go on and wait for them there. In this way they would have a line of escape clear of the hornet's nest they would leave behind them at Fogasta.

"And your plan of getting away from here?" asked Jennifer.

"Simple enough. We slip away down stream under the cover of darkness. About three in the morning we leave the schooner. I have arranged with my good friends that men and donkeys will be waiting for us at a certain point, and that everything should be done with the greatest secrecy. I am hoping that everyone will take it for granted that we have simply put back to sea again—particularly as the *Evelyn Hope* will go out to sea; we should have nothing to fear."

"And do we all go with you?" asked Liliias Seyler in her old bold way.

"It is for you to choose," said Martin quietly. "I

Tied Hands

have already tried to point out the dangers and trials of the jungle trail.”

“I am coming with you,” said Jennifer.

“And I most certainly must be in at the death,” smiled Liliias, and she looked at Martin pointedly. She, anyhow, knew what the rescue of Ralph Felton would mean . . . and meant to enjoy the revenge it would give her.

Evening darkened to a night that was, luckily, thick with rain clouds. Indeed the tropic night rain came softly to their aid, before they moved, so that, across the sleek waters of the great river, the lights of Fogasta were blurred to a soft orange. Night came and a dead quietness, with only the monkeys on the further bank barking in their eerie monotone, only the faint tinkle of mule bells from the dark quays of Fogasta, and now and then the distant, disembodied shout of a man.

Ten-thirty and all hands stood ready to slip the anchor, with Martin Sondes waiting on the poop for the moment to give his orders. It was then that he laughed softly, gave a command to the mate, who vanished forward, and pointed to a savage red glow that was growing over a dark quarter of Fogasta.

“They have given us the signal,” he said. “There’s the sign that tells we are about to be attacked.”

“What is it?” asked Bevis. “A bonfire?”

“A house on fire,” said Martin. “The whole of Fogasta will gather to enjoy it—including the officials who should be watching us. While they watch the

The Brute

beach thieves who have arranged it all will come off and rob us without interference."

"Do you mean to say they have fired that house to cover up their attack?" asked Bevis.

"An old trick to distract attention," said Martin.

"They are certainly experts," said Paul, "but meanwhile we are moving."

"Meanwhile we are moving," said Martin, "and presently we will be moving faster, when our sails help the current. The rogues who have marked our position will think we have sunk clean through the river."

They were slipping along with the stream, one of the Englishmen steering by guiding marks indistinguishable to the passengers. It was some time before they heard the boats behind them. There were many boats, all obviously quartering the spot where the schooner should have been. The party on the *Evelyn Hope* heard voices calling softly, heard the bewilderment in those voices. They could almost feel the men casting about in their minds for the place in which the schooner might be.

"In a minute we'll be round the bend, can hoist sail and be free of them," murmured Martin.

But at just that instant a dago on the deck decided that this was the time to smoke.

They heard the scratch of the inefficient "State Monopoly" match on the box. It seemed to rasp through the air like a shout. They waited paralyzed for the spurt of flame which must give them away to

Tied Hands

the boatloads of cut-throats astern. It must come any minute.

Scratch! went the match with a splutter of tiny blue sparks. . . . Now must come the flame.

Scratch. . . . "You dog!" came the quiet voice of Paul. There was the soft smack of knuckles against flesh and bone. A grunt. The thud of a body on deck. The match had not lit.

Martin was with Paul, bending down.

"Knock out. . . . Good lad, Paul," he whispered. "Kick the brute into the lamp-house there. . . . That's it."

Paul, without a civilized squirm, kicked the fallen dago into the lamp-house and shut the door.

The voices behind them trailed into nothingness. They were almost out of hearing. They were safe. . . . Only, suddenly lights began to dance on the water far astern. Lights flashing sharp, dangerous rays. . . . The dagos, made bold by desperation, were hunting for them with electric torches. Their hearts stood still. . . . And then, as suddenly, something swept between them and the lights. A curtain fell and obliterated not merely the lights on the water, the blurred orange of the fire in Fogasta, but also the sounds of Fogasta. At the same time they realized that the *Evelyn Hope* was heeling gently, and Martin was barking orders that sent men running to the sail ropes. . . . They had rounded the bend of the river. They had escaped.

In due time two boats were lowered, loaded with all that was needed for rapid travelling, and with

The Brute

the money made up into parcels to look like clothes. Into the boats, too, the whole of the party descended with Martin Sondes in command. The mate remained on the schooner to take her round to San Anjo. Ropes were paid out and they were drawn through the darkness of the jungle night, with the *Evelyn Hope* no more than a patch of deeper blackness in that night. In the first of the boats Martin Sondes was watching the shore and, every few seconds, flashing an electric torch. They all watched the shore in the deep stillness. The only sound was the rustle of clothes, and the suck and chuckle of the water as they were drawn through the hot night. One—two. . . . One—two—three went the white flash in the front boat. . . . Black night. . . . One—two. . . . One—two—three the flash again. . . .

A little gasp went up from them all. Distant, in the solid wall of the night, a pin point of white had started to wink. . . . One—two. . . . One—two, . . . One—two—three. . . . A long ray of light from the leading boat. . . . And suddenly they were not moving; the ropes had been cast off. Jennifer just had time to see the *Evelyn Hope* vanish, a black shadow swallowed silently by the blackness over the water. She was gone. In that thick, tropic blackness they felt as though the world had dropped away from under their feet, leaving them hanging in the vast, empty spaces of the night.

CHAPTER XVII

IN TERMS OF LOOT

A SUDDEN burst of the rudder-motor in the first boat, which towed the other, and they shot across the broad river to where a white light held steady. Quite soon they were standing on the damp and marshy soil, while languid, ragged men, with the manner of dukes, save when their long glances paid tributes of admiration to the two beautiful if breeched women, loaded the donkeys with the packages from the boats. It was quickly done, and then, with a word, the single English hand in the boats started up the motor and shot out into the night to overtake the schooner.

They were alone, alone in a mysterious and menacing jungle. No longer had they the protection of the sea and a good ship to safeguard them. They were alone, left alone to attempt an adventure that might mean death or prison, to fight ugly forces, the power of which they could only guess. They had only themselves to depend upon, and that meant Martin Sondes. Without him, Jennifer felt, they would be lost. With him—well, she was certain they would be successful. She had come to that point in her knowledge of him. He was a man so remarkable that she simply could not conceive of any situation in which he would fail.

The Brute

They moved up through the darkness of the night, following a trail intolerably rough and difficult. They climbed until they were bone weary and drenched with perspiration from the thick heat of the night. Jennifer was beginning to wonder if she could finish the march when a fresh wind blew on their faces, and the donkeys who had toiled and sighed at a crawl, began to trot upon level ground. Soon there was the definite pressure of a sea wind felt at an altitude, and they knew they were on the top of the high plateau round which the river wound to the sea. They camped there, sleeping like logs almost where they dropped to the ground.

Next morning the real march began, and it happened that that beginning had an ominous quality.

As the peons packed up and the animals moved off into the forest trail, the rest of the party rode to the edge of the plateau to take a last look at the river beneath. Martin Sondes had told them they were almost bound to see the *Evelyn Hope*, for the bend was a big one. He was right. They saw the *Evelyn Hope* like a toy beneath them.

And they saw another toy ship too.

She was limping up stream. Her gear was sadly out of order and there was a stain on her main deck that suggested she had been on fire. It took them a full minute to recognize that she was no other than the *Donna Diaba*. Martin told them that there was no doubt about it. Instead of heading back to Saluce the *Donna* had come up to Fogasta for repairs. And there was no doubt she had done that because those

In Terms of Loot

on board her hoped against hope that they would hear news of the party.

They looked down with much of the excitement of refugees who see pursuing bloodhounds on their trail. They watched the two ships approach each other with beating hearts. Would anything happen? Would those on the *Donna* attack the *Evelyn Hope*, for they must feel that the party and the money was on board, they knew no different. The ships came level, about a cable apart. The *Donna* seemed to hang. . . . Then they saw that she was going on. Calmly, without exchanging a shot, she limped ahead, making for Fogasta.

They stared down, wondering, hoping it did not mean anything ugly. Paul said: "She's too damaged, I suppose, to risk a fight with the schooner."

"There is that," said Martin noncommittally.

"But you don't think that is the reason," said Lilius. "What is the reason she didn't attack the *Evelyn Hope*?"

"I know no more than you."

"What do you think is the reason?" asked Jennifer.

"It looks," he said evenly, "as though they were aware that we are no longer on board."

"But how?" from Paul. "They couldn't possibly have heard."

"I can only give you my explanation. They ought to have attacked. . . . How do they know? Nothing easier than that some crazy deck-hand should yell the news across in the hope of saving his throat from

The Brute

Cipriano's knife. . . . Oh, well, even if they do know, they don't know the full facts. Nobody knows we are bound for Senzala, not even the mate. We've got that start of them."

They had that start of Cipriano and his cut-throats, but, as they rode from the plateau into the misty gloom of the jungle trail, they felt the sense of ominousness depressing them. These scoundrels were following them and might add a deadly complication to those waiting for them at Senzala.

Soon, however, the discomforts of their journey banished all other thoughts.

Jungle trails are alike in their damnableness throughout all tropic countries. They only differ in some having more barrenness and thirst and others having more flies and biting things. The jungle track to Senzala was mainly flies and biting things.

They pushed doggedly for days through the heat of a Turkish bath in the dank bloom of a cellar. Their path was sometimes no more than a runnel a few inches wide, worn by the feet of hunters. High overhead the trees, matted by vines, shut out all light of the sun, leaving to them the morbid gloom of decaying things.

Along this path they stumbled and sweated. Hacking now and then through the vines that had grown across the path since the last traveller had passed, crawling over fallen trunks matted with slimy growths from which snakes fled, wriggling, unless they were jararacas, when they turned to fight. As they fought their way slowly on even their thin, light

In Terms of Loot

garments frayed and chafed their heat-moist skin, and every now and then they had to halt to dig out the heads of little red burrowing insects with needles. When night came they beat the bush for snakes and lit fires and slung their hammocks and slept like dead people. . . . Only Martin saw to it that they were well guarded.

Out of the jungle they crossed plats of sun-bitter earth, where bare soil and callous rock threw back the glare like hot brass so that they felt the very marrow in their bones becoming parched. It was a terrible march to people not inured to such conditions. Roughness of going, heat and enervating humidity sapped all their strength and they toiled limply like rags of human beings. And yet they must go on, go on fast and keep going on. Cipriano was behind them somewhere, the officials and thieves of Fogasta might start after them at any minute should a rumour of their journey get out. They must go on. Even when the peons began to murmur against the urgency, they went on, Martin dealing with them firmly and decisively and Paul, now his right-hand man, ably seconding him.

It was a marvel how they all stood the grinding march, how the women endured it.

Passing along the column on the third day Martin came upon Jennifer reeling with weariness in her saddle. He frowned at her condition, eased his stride beside her.

"I think we'll stop at the next clearing. You want a good solid sleep."

The Brute

"I want a million years of sleep, in a cool room, and now," she said smiling wanly. "Only the next halt isn't for three hours, is it?"

"We'll have to make a change. You can't go on in that condition."

"You'll see in three hours' time. I don't halt until then."

"No. No. You must rest."

"I won't. I go on. We don't stop an unnecessary minute."

"You don't want to crack up and lose time through illness, do you?"

"I won't crack up. I refuse to crack up. I am going on, Martin."

He looked at her as she lolled in the saddle, fatigued but indomitable.

"You've got tremendous pluck, Jennifer," he said in admiration.

She answered quite inconsequently yet with a reviving spirit.

"It's a long time since you threw me a word, Martin. Why don't you come and talk with me sometimes?" And then, as though she had been too bold: "There is nothing so revivifying to the female heart as a morsel of gossip."

He stared at her, a little sick at heart. He *had* kept away from her. It was better so. Why build up an intimacy that was delicious? It would only make the break more bitter when Felton was rescued. He stared, and before he could answer she went on, smiling:

In Terms of Loot

“Your primitive conditions are making me primitive, Martin. I have a primitive desire to cut fencing and go straight to the point. I miss talking to you, Martin. Why don’t you talk to me?”

He answered with a half-truth: “On this sort of march one loses the instinct for being sociable.”

“I have a feeling that you are keeping away from me deliberately,” she said.

“It’s the conditions. On the trail like this one becomes morose.”

His answers had no effect on her. She went on calmly: “It’s queer, but we seem to have reversed positions. It is you who are losing your directness and fencing like a drawing-room diplomat, while I—I am going back to elemental brass tacks. Conditions,—you can’t expect me to believe that. When conditions were even more exacting, when we attacked the *Donna* we were nearer to each other, more candid. Martin, whose fault is it, yours or mine, that we have lost that sense of intimacy? I valued it. It was rather fine, rather stimulating.”

“On the *Donna* it was exciting. Here it is just a dull grind.”

She looked at him level, clear-eyed, steady-eyed.

“All right,” she smiled. “I won’t beat my head against *that* wall, then, if you are going to keep it stony. But on another count—talking is a tonic. See how much I have revived already. Why not try it if not in friendship then as a treatment?”

She was smiling, she was joking, despite a certain gravity behind her eyes. And she had spoken the

The Brute

truth. She had revived. She had thrown off the deadly limpness of her weariness in their short talk. He did have a stimulating effect on her, he could see that in the sparkle of interest in her eyes, the new alertness of her slim poise. They *were* affinities. They did draw strength and courage from one another. . . . He could feel that in himself, too. For this girl he would dare anything—privation, pain, ruin, death . . . yes, ruin and death, wasn't that exactly what he was doing?

He said, catching at her spirit:

“Yes, I can see that talk is good medicine. But I'm rather a dull fellow, Jennifer. What can I talk about?”

“There's always yourself,” she smiled at him. “You don't know how curious a human female can be about the reason why a man like you is out here. Why is he out here?”

He laughed at her: “You're not afraid that the answer might be, ‘He bolted from the police?’ ”

“That would be too unconvincing,” she smiled. “You may have done an immense number of things, but any sort of crime would be against your nature. What was it, adventure?”

His heart leaped a little. After all, whatever he might have done, she could see he was straight. He answered lightly:

“Partly adventure; partly necessity. I had just enough money to drift round and enjoy myself at home. . . . Not enough to do anything big. And I suppose I had an itch to get out and do something I

In Terms of Loot

thought bigger than drifting round and amusing myself.”

“I should say you hated that—our sort of life, Martin.”

“I didn’t like it, Jennifer,” he admitted. “It seemed to me rather petty and wasteful and mean. That sort of life just made me sick. It was so artificial, and so proud of itself. The people did nothing and gave themselves such airs over it. . . . I just had to get away to where life was more simple and natural and straight, where I could do something.”

“Why did you come out here?” asked Jennifer.

“A queer thing, that,” he smiled. “I was pulled out here—*pulled*. I don’t know whether you’ll believe it, but there was something in me that seemed to demand coming to South America. There were other countries where I might have gone. . . . But, no, something in my blood said ‘South America.’ And I came out here like a bird homing. And there was something in my blood, you know. I found that out one day when I went up to a little town on one of the Amazon tributaries. . . . Oh, I didn’t go accidentally. One of the senators in Rio had told me a story about a man of my name having once done rather useful things in that little town. It was true. In the Administration Building of that place there was a painting—a bad painting, but very recognizable as some bad paintings are—that might have been of myself. It was of a man named Sonda. This man Sonda had been a wonderful person. He had practically cleared the jungle and built the town. He

The Brute

had also administered it with such character and efficiency, over one hundred and twenty years ago, that the fineness and prosperity of his rule still lingers and keeps that little town a quite important centre today."

"That is quite wonderful," said Jennifer startled.

"Sonda of course means Sondes. . . . Was he any relation?"

"My great-grandfather," said Martin. "Of course I knew vaguely that the pile he had made, and which his son and grandson so sumptuously squandered, had been made out this way. But I hadn't particularized it in any way. And I hadn't seen that it was his blood in me that had urged me out here. It was, though. After the dear old chap had done magnificent things for his fellow-men, and, incidentally, his family, out here, he had gone home, somewhere in his late forties, and had married a smart wife. That was all plain enough when I put two and two together. I suppose his smart wife bound him to home, and the call of his second home was not to be answered until I came."

"It's marvellous. Did you take up his work again?"

"No. That would have been butting in on conditions already formed. But—well, I suppose I had enough of his spirit to try to help human lives where I could. These Indians and half-breeds in backwater places. . . . I conceived the idea that, if I could feed them with the things of civilization, I could help build up something. Not much, of course, but my theory is, that, though each man can add only a mite to the sum of the total of the world's progress, it is the

In Terms of Loot

adding up, the accumulation of such mites that *is* human progress.”

“I can see it,” she smiled. “You went among those backward peoples helping them inch by inch in the uses and advancements of civilization. That’s a sort of missionary work. . . .”

“The best kind of missionary work is like that. I hope you are not scoffing at missionaries. It’s a popular pastime—only don’t do it. The people who rail against missionaries are generally those whom the missionaries have prevented exploiting the ignorant Indian. That’s a fact. Especially hereabouts, the religious element has had a long and hard fight to prevent the exploitation of the native. That’s why they’re not popular. . . . You see, our sort generally think they have a divine right to exploit. . . . But that’s neither here nor there. And I don’t want you to think that I haven’t had pretty good value for what I have done in my trading. . . . It’s profitable, but outside the cash return there has been the satisfaction of winning the suspicious and timid by straight dealing, and adding to the lot of human life by broadening conditions and viewpoints. . . . I’ve been working like this for ten years in my own schooner.”

“How is it you have the reputation for—well, darling?”

“I suppose I like excitement,” he smiled. “And, then, some of the places I have been to, and some of the Indians I have won over have been dangerous enough. . . . Nobody else dared go to them. Then,

The Brute

once or twice, I have accepted contracts, like this one, for the extra profit, and, yes, the amusement I might get out of them. . . . I went up a river and sunk the navy—it was an old Mississippi river boat—of a rather tyrannical republic for the sake of a body of patriots who preferred a freer rule. I've run gold ore from a coast town when a thieving government had decided to break all contracts and take a seventy-five-per-cent valuation instead of a ten-per-cent as per concession. . . . That sort of thing has come naturally to me. I suppose I've hot blood in me."

"Or a sense of justice," she smiled. "I notice that both these things meant the righting of wrongs. . . . Just as the venture we are on now means the righting of a wrong."

Martin felt it hard to stand up under that. . . . It almost drove him back into silence. The rescue of that blackguard Felton the righting of a wrong! The irony of it was ghastly. He could scarcely answer lightly and ambiguously. He could hardly keep up the conversation, though he saw it had, indeed, revived and stimulated her so that she was a new and refreshed creature. He exchanged sentences lamely for a minute, and was glad of the opportunity of some sort of stoppage ahead to ride on to set the line going again.

He did not fall back to her, but remained striding doggedly among the leaders. His thoughts were black enough. They did not become lighter when Lilius Seyler pressed her donkey forward and ranged along

In Terms of Loot

side. Her slow, enigmatic smile played over him as she looked down.

“What a passion you strong silent men have for turning the dagger in the wound!” she mocked.

“And that means what?” he asked.

“Oh, you needn’t pretend with me!” she smiled. “The natural language of animosity is candour.”

He did not think that worth answering.

“But I suppose one cannot evade these heart-to-heart talks with Jennifer,” she said.

“Why should one?” he answered shortly.

“Where will they lead?” she said softly, fiercely, and without mockery. “Don’t you see that they only lead to a greater hurt—when we rescue that man?”

He stared rather surprised. He didn’t expect sympathy from her. She laughed a little bitterly:

“You might have said, ‘But surely you, Lilius Seyler, will enjoy it the more for that.’”

“I didn’t even think it,” he answered.

“And you don’t think, either, I suppose, that there is something in me that rebels at the sight of you—you being the sport and the victim of a little milksop like that.”

“Miss Seyler,” he said quietly, “I don’t think we’ll gain anything by going into that again.”

“No,” she said, and her old mocking smile was forced to her lips again. “Not a thing. And I spoil my pleasure by allowing a little feminine nature to intervene to try and save you. I suppose this trying

The Brute

march saps one. . . . A little weariness makes women of us all.”

“You are not quite fair to yourself, Miss Seyler,” he began. . . .

“Don’t soothe me,” she sneered. “It was just a weakness. I succumbed to a moment of pity that a man of your type should be plunging deeper instead of breaking free, as anybody of character should. . . . I am myself now, Martin, and hating you quite heartily. When we have rested while you go after Ralph, and my old vitality is fully restored, I shall be able to enjoy to full capacity the engaging drama of Ralph exposing you to his trusting sister—and her reaction.”

She nodded with the mocking smile on her lips, and a dark, cruel light in her eyes, and fell back in the line.

CHAPTER XVIII

GREEN GLOOM TRAILS

THEY camped at last and had a long day of much needed rest. They did not approach the little *campos* town of Senzala for that was too dangerous, but lay snug under the shelter of an arm of the forest. Martin then delegated his authority to Bevis Probyn, and, with Paul Glen, rode down to the lethargic and sprawling town.

He and Paul were dressed as *aviadors*, the pedlar-traders of Portuguese-America who travel from station to station through the jungle selling goods like hawkers. Pack animals went with them, with an assortment of goods Martin had bought back in Fogasta. They also carried a fair sum of money, but not much. Martin Sondes was prepared to bribe, but he knew that, with Cipriano and his rogues not far behind, daring action was their only chance of success. Bribery would be a long-drawn out and leisurely process, for in the land of *amanha* (tomorrow) why hurry? Well, they had need to hurry.

The choice of companion had been a difficulty. It would have been better to have brought Bevis Probyn, for he could speak the language, but that would have meant leaving Paul in charge of the camp, where his reckless inexperience might have been a danger. It would also deprive Martin of an assistant whose

The Brute

strength, courage and daring would be useful at a crisis. If Paul had only a smattering of the language—but they got over that by making Paul dumb.

Adequately disguised, Martin and Paul rode down through the rolling grass lands to Senzala. The little town had been an output station in the early days of the Portuguese occupation, a kind of ward on the edge of the jungle to guard against attack from Indians the vast herds of cattle that once roamed the *campos*. Now the cattle kings had drifted south to Argentine and the great grass was empty. And Senzala had lost its vitality too. It was now a sleepy town too big for its population, though political time-servers had striven to placate its voting strength by making it a penal settlement—which is a very profitable thing in a land where prisoners starve and die but for the food and comforts bribes can procure.

Evidences of the local industry were met half a mile from the town itself. At one of the few remaining ranches they came upon a gang of convicts lazily repairing some crazy cattle sheds and outbuildings scattered along the track. They were a mangy crew, but not uncheerful. They were clad in rags that made the senses revolt at the mere sight of them, but they were smoking, talking, laughing and even singing. They were glad, in fact, to be out of the odoriferous and cramped quarters of their makeshift prison. Moreover there was nothing exacting about their task. The indolent guards were quite content to leave them alone as long as they did nothing desperate.

Green Gloom Trails

The guards, almost as ragged as their prisoners, were only distinguished from them by a sketchy effect of military uniform, their bayoneted rifles, and their sleepy determination to avoid all form of mental or physical exertion.

There were an extraordinary number of them, many on foot, many cavalymen lounging by their lean, swift little horses. Guarding prisoners, indeed, was one of the few excuses the present President of Fogasta had for keeping a large army to support himself and his version of Democratic Liberty.

They looked pleasant little fellows, these ragged soldiers, and in their lazy, charming way they were. But let any one of their charges give them but the slightest excuse for their favourite pastime of shooting off guns, and they would act like savages. The infantry would fire and use their bayonets with terrific zest, and the horsemen would have fine sport in riding their victim down, bringing him to earth with the bolos that hung at their saddles, and then finishing him off with their lances. The prisoners knew this quite well. That was why the guards were able to loll gracefully and smoke without anxiety.

Sondes, as indolent, apparently, as any real dago, stopped and chatted with the first group of guards. He gave them the blessings of Heaven, and took the same for himself. He explained that Paul had the gifts of dumbness and feeble wits—things that give a man an almost holy reputation in Latin-America—and after discussing prospects of trade and the lottery, asked permission to make a little offering of

The Brute

cigarettes to the unfortunates under Heaven and the law of Fogasta. It is the thing one does naturally in those parts.

Piously he handed cigarettes to a group of prisoners, his eyes examining each alertly. He was hoping that his luck would be in, and that he would see Jennifer's half-brother.

He saw instead an old Chinaman, but he made even that help. It was by expressing wonder at the sight of a Chinaman there that he caused the sergeant of the guard to say in accents of pride:

"That is nothing. We have an Inglez in this squad."

Sondes would not believe it. With pulses racing a little he protested that such a thing could not be.

"You couldn't," he averred, "ever put an Inglez into prison; not a real Inglez; this man pretends he is a real Inglez."

"He is truly real," said the guard with growing pride. "He comes from the great city Piccadilly, which, as you know, is in the United Kingdom of England, London, and Ireland."

"I would like to talk with him," said Martin sceptically. "I would soon show you, for I am a man of learning. I speak this Inglez."

That was how they found Ralph Felton.

The guard said "Come." He led Sondes to one end of a building where a full-blooded Indian and a tall shambling wretch worked lazily. The Indian went on working stoically, the other man come cringing towards them. He put out his hand.

Green Gloom Trails

“Senhor, a cigarette for the love of——” He stopped, and the pale, shifty eyes in the fat, mean face were suddenly filled with craven terror. “Sondes!” he cried, shrinking back. “My God, Sondes!”

Martin Sondes gave the ingratiating smile of the dago pedlar to the long, shambling figure so loose and flabby. He said with a biting edge to his voice:

“Keep your nerve, Felton. I’m here to get you away if I can.”

To cover the fellow’s confusion, he turned and said solemnly to the guard:

“Yes, he knows some Inglez; quite good. But I will see if he is only pretending.”

Felton, looking at Martin with eyes crafty as well as fearful, whimpering incredulously:

“*You* here to help me to get away, Sondes! That doesn’t sound quite genuine.”

“I’m hired to do it. I’ve promised. Your half-sister is outside Senzala, up at the Encantar dell, waiting to get you away.”

“Jennifer?” cried Ralph Felton with amazement in his eyes.

“Yes, Jennifer Daun,” said Martin, in so stiff a voice that Felton shot a look at him and began to leer. The guard said:

“What is this Jennifer, he speaks of, senhor?”

“I am asking him, since he says he comes from the city of Piccadilly, if he knows the great store called Jennifer which everybody should know. He says he does, but I am going to find out.”

The Brute

Felton said:

“How in the blazes did Jennifer get out here. meet you, put *you* under her spell?”

“We can’t go into that now,” Martin objected stiffly. “Have you got any idea about getting away?”

“None worth a damn,” said Felton with half a snivel. “Out here, you see, it’s hopeless. These curs would get me and cut me to pieces before I could make the forest. And, even after that, without money——”

“What about the prison itself?”

“Darn risky!” bleated Felton.

“We’ll have to take risks,” Sondes answered. “Have you any suggestions?”

“You know you could bribe these fellers.”

“No time,” said Martin. “It’s got to be a quick job. We’ve got a pack of sneak-thieves on our trail now.”

Felton said hesitatingly:

“There is a way I’ve always thought of, but it’s risky.”

“Get on with it,” Sondes snapped.

“This is what I thought. Alongside the prison is the *hospedaria*——”

“Use your own language, you fool!”

“Sorry! Sorry!” cried Felton, squirming unpleasantly. “Well, one side of the prison is made up by the wall of the inn of St. Pius. The inn has a flat roof. Somebody with a rope might get down from that roof into the little *sub-patio*”——he squirmed again——“I mean, courtyard, on that side. The door of the cell which I and twenty others sleep in, opens on to

Green Gloom Trails

the court. There is a number on it—No. 3. But climbing down that rope means risking the guard—and outing him.”

“The door of your cell locked?”

“The sentinel on duty has the key. He’s supposed to be ready to admit the commandante at any time he chooses to make his rounds. But he never makes them at night.”

“Is the sentinel the only guard in the courtyard?”

“The only one awake. There’s a little guard-room away to the left. You’ll know it because a light is burning in it. But the guards are always asleep.”

“Right. You’d better be as close to the door of your cell as possible tonight and the next few nights. Be ready to slip out instantly. What time is the best?”

“Oh, after eleven, the others will be asleep then. We don’t want any of the scum in with me to get out, do we?” He saw the flicker of contempt pass across Sondes’s eyes. “I mean to say, if they all got loose they might raise Cain, and it would be risky for me—I mean, you.”

“Very well,” Martin agreed. “When I come, tonight or tomorrow, it will be after eleven. Be ready.”

“Yes,” said Felton; and his lips were dry. “But bribing would be ever so less dangerous.”

“We have not the time. Your half-sister is in danger, too, don’t forget.”

“Ah, yes, Jennifer,” he said. “Up at Encantar, you said, with peons and money and everything, ready to get away?”

The Brute

“That is so,” said Sondes. He turned to the sergeant of the guard. “It is as you say. It is amazing, but he is veritably an Inglez. He tells me——” He gave a highly unveracious story that he declared the prisoner had told him as they went to rejoin the “dumb” Paul and the donkeys.

Then with courtly adieux they rode into Senzala and to the Inn of St. Pius.

Everything was as Felton had said. The extemporized prison building abutted the wall of the inn, and from the flat roof Martin looked straight down into the little courtyard. On the whole things were going to be very simple. A man could easily get down into that *patio* by means of a rope, and he considered himself well able to deal with any dago guard.

Satisfied he made his plans for that night. He went out into the town and bought two strong, plaited hide lariats and three good horses to replace, he said, his overtired trading donkeys. He arranged, much to his disgust, that Paul should be stationed with those horses in a little side street not a hundred yards from the back door of the inn, and, about eleven o'clock, after seeing that all the doors necessary to their escape were unbolted, he climbed to the roof.

Staring down into the well of the *patio* he could see to the left the small square of light made by the guard-room window. There was also a dim lamp burning under the colonnade of the *patio*; but no other light. Against these lights at rare intervals he watched the bulking shadow of a man. As that

Green Gloom Trails

shadow had attached to it the outline of a fixed bayonet, Sondes knew him to be the sentinel.

A quarter of an hour after Martin had taken up his position the sentry had gone towards the colonnade, and his footsteps had not returned. Sondes had also heard in the dead silence of the night such a sound as might be made by the knocking of a bayonet scabbard against a bench. He had also heard a few unmistakable snores. He guessed that, true to his racial instinct, the sentry was wrapped in stolen repose. Martin slid his knotted lariats over the coping of the inn wall.

The wall, if anything, was in denser darkness than the well of the *patio*, and Sondes, going down that rope like a cat, was not seen. It was dark at the bottom, but the lights of the guard-room and colonnade had more power here. He could see he was in a square court, surrounded by a heavy arcade, and under the arches he made out the shadowy blackness of the cell doors. He could not see the sleeping sentry; he was probably snug in a corner. The guard-room window was twenty paces from him.

The wall by which he had come was black, and save for a few windows, blank. It would be difficult to locate his rope against it in a hurry. Sondes took out his watch and bound it to the rope, steadying its back flat against the wall. He would see the radium dial shining greenly.

He crept silently to the guard-room window. Two men in hammocks and two on benches snored there. He was sorry to find that there was no way of jam-

The Brute

ming or locking their door and keeping them prisoners. He did one useful thing, however. The four rifles were propped against the wall near the door, and he found that by stretching his arm, and moving with the utmost delicacy, he could lift them through the door. He did so. There would be no shooting and a general alarm, anyhow.

He put the rifles in the gutter running round the *patio* and walked across to where the sentry must be. As he thought, the fellow was huddled in a very comfortable corner, cuddling his rifle and deep in sleep. At his belt, as Felton had suggested, gleamed a bunch of keys.

Sondes put out his left hand and softly grasped the rifle so that it should not fall with a clatter to the ground. Then he gently stirred the dago soldier with something he carried in his right. The dago opened his dreamy eyes, saw the fierce face hanging above him, opened his mouth to shout, saw the thing that Sondes held in his right hand, and shut his mouth. The thing in Martin's right hand was an automatic pistol; the dago has a reverence for such things.

"Senhor is wise," Sondes murmured. "I am a desperate man, and the top of one's skull blows off quickly. Will the senhor have the grace to be wiser; that is, lay himself on his honourable stomach on the ground with his hands behind his back? Gently, senhor, both our lives are such frail things. And one loud word—I see, the senhor is of admirable understanding."

Green Gloom Trails

In a trice, Martin had the man trussed and gagged with the rope he had brought for just this purpose. He took the man's keys, went round the *patio* again until he came to the cell door No. 3. He had found, under the colonnade lamp, that each key bore a numbered metal tag, so it was easy to open the door. When he did so, Felton came out with such a rush that he knocked Martin's hand from the keys in the door. Fortunately, the keys did not fall out.

"Steady, you fool!" Sondes hissed softly.

"Where's the rope?" cried Felton in a croaking whisper. "Show me the rope! I must get up at once."

His teeth were chattering, he was trembling violently, he was beside himself with craven panic. Sondes's went out and caught him by the throat.

"Do you want to go back into that cell?" he growled. "Steady yourself, or I'll pitch you back neck and crop."

"Will you?" snivelled Felton. "Will you, and what will you say to Jennifer then—dear Jennifer?"

Sondes's hand tightened in fury; he shook the fellow like a rat.

"You dog!" he whispered. "I've a good mind to kill you here and now—you deserve it."

Under the ferocity of Martin's anger, Felton broke into an abject whimper.

"I take it back," he wailed. "Don't be a brute—my nerve's all gone. If you'd got a chance of escaping from this hell you'd understand what my nerves are like."

The Brute

“Well, get ’em back,” said Sondes; “or you’ll never get out of this. How do you think you are going to get up that rope?”

Felton at this threat to himself steadied.

“All right,” he whispered. “I’m all right now. Honest! I’ll manage. I’ll climb it, don’t fear. Where is the rope?”

“Can you see that splash of green light on the wall? That’s the rope,” Sondes said, and Felton would have run toward it had not the captain’s strong arm held him. “Wait a minute,” Sondes went on. “That isn’t all of it. We’ve got to prepare for accidents. When you’ve got to the roof of the inn, slip down through the building and out of it to the Rua Gelosia. Know it?”

“A little blind alley. I know it well.”

“Good! There is a man waiting with three horses there. An Englishman, Paul Glen. He’s ready for you. If there’s any accident here, get off at once. But *you’ll* recognize it’ll be fatal to wait.”

“Good heavens, yes!” moaned Felton. Then in a sly voice he asked, “Does this fellow Glen know that? He won’t wait?”

“He won’t wait if there’s trouble,” said Sondes. “I’ve given him instructions. He knows the risks.”

“Excellent! Excellent! Now, can I climb the rope?”

Martin had to restrain his eagerness so that they should cross the *patio* unheard. He guided the fellow’s trembling hands to the rope, and watched him begin to mount shakily.

Green Gloom Trails

He did it so clumsily that again and again his shoes and knees scraped the wall. So great was the noise in that dead, hot silence that Sondes turned about and kept his eyes closely on the guard-room window.

Up and up the fellow went. There was a rattle as he touched a window jalousie that sent Martin's hand swiftly to his pistol. But there was no stirring in the guard-room.

The fellow must be up by now. Martin, turning round and looking up, even imagined he saw the bulk of his head and shoulders against the sky, as though Felton had made the roof and was looking down. He watched the green, shining dial of the watch for the three jerks which were to tell him that he could climb in turn.

As he watched, something came hissing by his head, and a tile crashed into the *patio* with an appalling smash.

At once a splutter of oaths broke out from the guard-room. The alarm had been given.

Sondes, with one glance at the guard-room window, flung out his hand to the rope.

There was no rope!

He sprang round quickly, searching for the green light of the watch dial. It was above his head, and travelling upward in sharp, quick jerks. It went up and up, frantically, and suddenly went right out of sight over the roof edge.

Ralph Felton had been true to character. At the first alarm he had determined at all costs to save him-

The Brute

self. He had saved himself and sacrificed his rescuer with as little compunction as a man killing a fly.

It was even possible that tile had not fallen accidentally, but had been thrown down to raise the guard. Felton was quite capable of removing his enemy that way, though that enemy had risked his life to save him.

CHAPTER XIX

THE AVIADORS

WHETHER by accident or design, Martin Sondes was trapped in a hopeless position.

There was absolutely no way of scaling the high walls of the prison and the guards were already coming into the courtyard. They had not quite realized what had happened, for they were much more concerned over the fact that they had lost their rifles, and were crying out to the sentry for an explanation of the situation. But though they did not understand it was only a matter of time before they did.

Martin saw this all in a flash, as he stood with his back against the wall he could no longer scale. Not being a fool, he had his fears; being an extraordinarily brave and capable man he had all his wits about him also.

He stood silently, watching the guard running out of the guard-room and round the *patio*. As soon as they were clear of the guard-room he moved towards it.

It was, he counted, his only real chance of getting away.

He slipped towards the door, but his luck was out. Three strides, and he bumped into an excited man. And the man was calling:

“Someone here! Who are you? Are you Alonso?”

The Brute

Sondes' fist drove to his stomach, but rammed ribs only. The fellow yelped in pain and panic. Martin's left to the jaw was final enough, but the damage had been done. The other guards were already rushing towards the sound.

Sondes wasted no time. He darted into the guard-room and slammed the crazy door behind him. Then he sprang in a single leap to the other door of the room.

It was locked. Of course, it would be locked; all the doors in a prison are locked. And the keys—the keys were even then hanging from the keyhole in the door of cell No. 3. What a fool he'd been to make that slip! Felton, in his panic, had distracted his attention from that important detail. He wondered if he should blow the lock out with his pistol. That would rouse the whole building, the whole garrison, possibly the whole town of Senzala, and the fleeing Felton might be caught. The thought of Jennifer made that line of action impossible. Should he try to hold up the whole guard-room at pistol-point and force them to let him out?

He half swung round. He was desperate and daring enough to do that.

A sharp exclamation came from the window, and his hand darted for his pistol.

“No, senhor,” snapped a harsh voice. “Your hands up! Away from that pistol, quick. And up! As much as the move of a fly's wing, senhor, and you are a dead man.”

A dago soldier was leaning through the window.

The Aviators

He held in his hand the most monstrous and ugly long-barreled Colt revolver Martin had even seen. And Martin saw in the fellow's eyes that he meant business. His hands went up. He stood stiffly against the wall.

Two men came into the guard-room and while one relieved him of his weapons another brought a pair of handcuffs from a rack and snapped them home on Martin's wrists. The soldiers were all rather good-tempered about the matter now that they had their man. It was the indolent Latin indulgence towards a helpless victim that masked the almost inhuman cruelty that could flare up at the first touch of anger. Martin understood their nature. He meant to try and make the most of it while he could. When one of the men said: "The saints were not with you this night, senhor," he answered with fatalistic resignation:

"It is the fortune of war."

The soldiers responded to that touch. They smiled in a friendly fashion. It pleased them that their prisoner should carry himself in the face of death as a true *cavaliero* should.

One of the men went out and presently returned with the sentry, surly and rubbing his wrists where the bonds had cut deeply. With them also staggered the man Sondes had knocked out. His profound shakiness did not prevent him from being in the fiercest of tempers. It was he who insisted that he should knife the prisoner then and there. The sentry protested against that, but merely on a point of etiquette.

The Brute

His, he declared, should be the hand to strike the blow. After all, his honour as a soldier, attacked and bound while on duty, was involved.

The two men wrangled over this point of procedure. The other three men sat calmly advancing their opinions on subtle phases of the situation. Nobody considered their prisoner's feelings! After all, he had very little concern in this matter; he was to die anyhow, so why bother about him? Even the reason of his presence did not seem to trouble them much. They guessed he was here to release a prisoner; and as there had been no sign of an escaping prisoner they assumed he had failed.

They were even ready, after about ten minutes' fruitless wrangling, to have his unbiased opinion as to the etiquette of his own death.

"There is one thing you have overlooked, senhors," Sondes said, knowing that his life hung on a mere thread, but speaking as calmly as he could, "that is, the disposal of my body. You will kill me, yes, but the presence of my unexpected corpse will perhaps cause some comment from the commandante. To account for it you will have to explain how you were caught napping."

"That," said the sergeant in charge, "is a very good point indeed."

They were all impressed by it. To avoid punishment was a matter even more important than satisfying one's honour.

"An excellent saying," said another of the soldiers.

The Aviators

“But, senhor, do you realize that your honourable body will be as difficult to dispose of alive as dead?”

“That is so,” said Martin, fighting grimly for his life, yet showing complete detachment. “But it might be of greater profit to you, senhors, if I walked out of this place without leaving visible trace or attracting attention.”

They stiffened immediately, and their eyes glistened. To be bribed was not merely pleasant, it was second nature to them. The knock-out man alone was still furious concerning his honour.

“No, there will be no difficulty about your corpse, senhor,” he cried. “I have solved that problem. We will say we found you breaking in here, and so killed you doing our duty. In that way our honour will be satisfied and we shall also get promotion.”

There was a murmur of agreement to this, but not so hearty a murmur. An excellent way out if nothing better offered, but bribery was still better.

Sondes pretended to consider this.

“A good plan indeed, senhor,” he admitted. “So good that it pains me to point out its one flaw. What will your commandante say to the fact that your sentry was so lacking in alertness as to allow me to get right into the *patio*?”

“That is very true,” cried the sentry anxiously. “He will be exceedingly angry.”

“It desolates me to have brought this trouble on you,” said Sondes. “I make my suggestion that further trouble might be eliminated and that I can offer you some compensation—as a gentleman should.”

The Brute

“He speaks like a true *cavaliero*,” said the sergeant, and the others nodded with greedy eyes.

“Fine promises do not buy even a dead donkey,” said the man who had felt Martin’s punches.

“That is so,” Sondes agreed with the coolness of desperation. “But I am ready to swear on the Cross to my good will, and to back it in cash to the extent of two contos of milreis.”

At that they all smiled; even the sullen man sat up.

“That is spoken like a true Fogastian,” cried the sergeant. “We thank you, senhor, for your goodwill in getting us out of our trouble. And this little matter of compensation—how will we get the money?”

“That is easy,” said Martin, suppressing his elation. “If one or two of you can come with me to my inn, now——”

He stopped suddenly. He had to stop. The sentry, in his eagerness to get to the inn, had put his hand to his belt where he carried his keys. The keys were gone.

Martin knew that this meant his doom. The soldiers stared at the place where the keys should be, and then at Martin. Their faces had suddenly gone frightened, wolfish. The sergeant said politely that no doubt the sentry had dropped those keys in the scuffle. They took a lamp and went to hunt for them in the *patio*.

Martin knew where they would find those keys, and what else they would find—or miss! He sank

The Aviators

down on a bench and resigned himself to death. It was all over. He found himself accepting extinction stoically. He did not even curse the disgusting cowardice of Felton that had brought him to this. But he thought of Jennifer, and he was sick at heart at the knowledge that he would not see her again.

The soldiers returned, and their faces were ugly. The sergeant scowled, and said to the two men who guarded Martin:

“He has let the Inglez, Buckingham, escape, *that* pig.”

The two men sprang up in fury, their hands went to their knives. They were ready to fall upon Martin together and cut him to pieces. The sergeant put out his hand.

“Softly,” he growled, “we have our own skins to think of. There is punishment for all of us unless we go with cleverness. Listen. We must raise an alarm, but as that dog has escaped, we must protect ourselves. We will kill this man, using the knife on throat and chest, showing that we fought face to face and hard—as is our duty. We will say he slipped in here and stunned Alonso with a cruel blow from behind. Then he stole the keys and opened the cell. But we, being ever on the alert, heard him, and dashed out in our zeal, not troubling to get our rifles. And so we killed him.”

“Had we better not shoot to show how earnestly we fought?” said a man.

“No, that will give the alarm and bring people in here before we are ready for them,” said the ser-

The Brute

geant. He turned to the man Martin had mauled. "You will use the knife. Make it look like a struggle."

Martin stood up. He thought of dashing at them and making a fight for it even with his manacled hands. But they were ready for that. All save the sergeant and his executioner now had their bayoneted rifles levelled at him. His executioner drew his knife with a slow, delighted smile, balancing it delicately in his hand.

"It must be outside," said the sergeant. "There must be no signs of a fight in here. Bring him out."

The men put down their rifles to drag him out. It seemed Martin's last moment on earth. He tried to remember a prayer. The men came at him.

From the door a voice, in halting Portuguese, demanded that all present should put their hands up, and do it quickly.

All swung about. In the doorway, with an automatic pistol in each hand, stood Paul Glen.

It took no time to deal with the guard. They were terrified. Martin's snapped commands that they should face the wall were immediately obeyed. Holding one of Paul's pistols in his manacled hands, Sondes covered the trembling wretches as Glen selected handcuffs from the rack and linked them all hand and foot in a helpless mass. From the same rack Paul took the key that released Martin.

Leaving the guard pinioned and gagged, they went out into the *patio*. There the greeny shine of the watch dial against the wall showed that the rope

The Aviators

was in place again, and what route Paul had used to come to the rescue. They climbed to the roof of the inn and made for the horses. It was not until they were clear of the town of Senzala that Martin reined to a walk and asked:

“What became of Buckingham?”

Felton was still Buckingham to Paul Glen.

“He rode off at a gallop,” said Paul. “Look here, Martin, what sort of swine is this Buckingham fellow?”

Martin’s first thought was to make things easier for Jennifer.

“Don’t forget he’s probably had his nerve broken in that hell behind us, Paul,” he suggested.

“Maybe so,” said Glen. “But it seems to me that even a broken nerve won’t explain how any man could leave his rescuer behind to face the knives of those brutes.”

“What happened to you?” asked Martin, anxious to know what line to take. “How did he explain things to you?”

“He came bursting up to me as though a thousand devils were at his heels. He said the alarm had been given, you’d been killed, and that we were to bolt for it like blue blazes or we’d be nabbed. He nearly stampeded me.”

“But he didn’t quite. Why?”

“Don’t quite know why,” Paul answered, grinning. “First reason, I suppose, was that I hadn’t heard a rumpus, and, as you don’t strike me as being at all a silent dier, I couldn’t believe you’d been finished so

The Brute

gently. Also he was in such a devil of a panic, and panicky men lie to save their skins. Then I didn't like his tone. It was half cringing, half hectoring. All these things made me inclined—as you have called it before—to debate the matter.”

“That's one on me, Paul,” Martin chuckled. “What was the fellow's story?”

“Oh, he said something gave the alarm. He said he was half-way up the rope then. The guard came out and attacked you. You yelled to him to escape. He got up to the roof thinking you could follow, but when he looked down he saw one of the guards get you with his knife. Then he came away. All lies, of course.”

“There are elements of truth in it,” said Martin drily, thinking of Jennifer.

“Don't believe a word of it,” said Glen staunchly. “Let's have the true story.”

“That'll serve as far as it goes,” Martin answered. “Save, of course, that the guard didn't stick me.”

Paul turned on his horse and stared at his companion.

“I see,” he said, in a voice of understanding. “But I wonder how he'll explain your live body to Jenni—to the others.”

“Oh—oh, he made a mistake in the dark. What he actually saw was me knocking out the guard. I followed him up the rope a minute later.”

“I see,” said Paul quietly. “All right. But I found that rope pulled up on the roof.”

“You can forget that detail,” said Martin easily.

The Aviators

"But how explain his arriving in camp before me? You ordered him off while you stood by waiting for me. It was darn good of you to come down after me, Paul."

"I just had to. When I saw that rope on the roof I guessed our lad with the yellow streak had left you in the lurch. I saw those dagos moving about in the *patio*, so I slid down to investigate."

"Yes, a real man would do it instinctively," said Martin with a touch of bitterness, and Paul Glen looked at him swiftly again.

"Strikes me you know something about this fellow Buckingham, Martin?" he said.

"I've heard of him before," said Martin grimly, non-committally.

"Something of a prize bad-hat, eh?"

"I don't think I'll give an opinion."

"That's evidence enough—from you," Glen answered. "And Jennifer doesn't know anything about him?"

"Not a thing, I should say."

"No, I don't think she does. She regards him as a sort of sorely tried god; adores him. But you—you've known all the time?"

"More or less."

"And you haven't told her?"

"Would you?"

Glen again shot a look at him.

"No, by Jove!" he said. "One can't do that sort of thing to a girl like Jennifer. She believes in him utterly. One couldn't spoil that—hurt her. But—"

The Brute

but you're a pretty darn good chap, Martin, all the same."

He put out his hand impulsively and grasped Martin's. They rode on in silence. Presently:

"I take it he knows where we're camping?" Glen asked.

"He made a point of asking me," Martin answered.

"So he's gone straight to her? I wonder what story he'll spill?"

"The only thing that matters is that she'll never have reason to disbelieve it."

"Oh, I say, that's rather thick. That scalawag is quite capable of saying things about us to save his face, I should say."

"He'll say the worst things about me," Martin observed. "But I shall not disillusion her."

Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"All right. I'll follow your line absolutely. You have my word I won't speak—if you don't."

"Thanks, Paul," said Martin. "I know I can rely on that."

It was as well that he could, for very soon Glen's loyalty was severely tested.

They reached camp in the light of dawn. Yet early as it was Paul saw with astonishment every evidence of preparation for hasty departure. The peons were getting hammocks and packages on to the donkeys at a great pace, and, most amazing thing of all, it was Jennifer, backed by the shambling figure of Ronald Buckingham, who was commanding this movement.

Paul could scarcely believe his eyes. That Jennifer was insisting on flight, not knowing what had

The Aviators

happened to Martin and himself, not *caring*, apparently, seemed to him incredible. Yet it was happening. Bevis Probyn was obviously arguing against her plan, but she did not listen. She was urging on the packing. She was ready to desert them.

But things more startling were to happen before Paul's eyes. As they rode up, Bevis swung to them with an exclamation of relief and pleasure, but Jennifer showed no such welcome.

She swung round at Bevis Probyn's cry, and the shambling Buckingham drew near and muttered something to her. Her face, which had been astonished, took on a blazing anger and disgust. She stared at Martin Sondes as though he were the fiend himself. As Martin swung from his horse near her, she stepped back as though he were unclean. He tried to speak to her. At once scorn and contempt flamed from her eyes. Her hand rose. The riding switch in it slashed across Martin's face.

Then, as Paul called out, she dropped her whip, and, with her every movement showing repulsion, she walked away. Buckingham, as Paul still named Felton, walked with her, keeping her between himself and Martin Sondes, and the leer he threw at the big man was at once cringing, sly and devilishly triumphant.

Martin stood grim and silent, with a red wale burning on his face. To Paul's astonishment, he made no move. It seemed to him a useless thing to do. Felton had obviously lost no time in letting Jennifer know that he was the man who had hunted him down.

CHAPTER XX

THE DAGO PRISON

“SHE’S gone utterly mad, I think,” said an angry Paul Glen fifteen minutes later. “She won’t listen to reason. She says she won’t have you in the party. She won’t even speak to you.”

Martin Sondes, watching the loading of three of his own pack animals, nodded.

“I understand her attitude,” he said quietly.

“I’m damned if I do,” Paul snapped. “I tried to get her to explain things. I tried to get her to be reasonable, and she went for me like a tiger-cat. She talks of you as though you were a blackguard, and seems to think I’m mixed up in something wrong, too.”

“It’s that fellow Buckingham—or rather, Felton,” said Bevis Probyn. “I don’t know what he has been saying to her, but what he said has changed her utterly.”

“What *he* said,” Paul sneered. “A pretty story, I’ll bet. That fellow will say anything. Look here, Bevis, that worm——”

“Paul!” Martin snapped.

“Oh, hell!” cried Glen, remembering he had given his word. “But look here, Martin, he must have told Jennifer something pretty extra foul for her to act like this.”

The Dago Prison

“I anticipated it,” said Martin.

The thing he had expected had happened. Felton had ridden post-haste to Jennifer and exposed him—he had learnt that much from Probyn. Felton had even added a crowning touch, it seemed. So far as Bevis could make out Felton appeared to have alleged that Martin’s rescue had been an attempt to kill him, that Sondes had hoped to draw the guards on to Felton to kill him, and had been caught in his own trap, Felton escaping only by cunning and courage. Glen, apparently, had played the part of blind dupe in this murderous scheme.

Martin could only guess at this, for Bevis had heard very little. But it was certain that the break with Jennifer was absolute. She knew Martin for the man she had promised to hate, and she had finished with him. Hatred was but a tame word for the emotion she felt. Felton had done his work well. He had given an unspeakable character to the man who had hunted him from town to town, and had ruined him. Felton was a master of half-truths. He had made the case against Martin absolutely damning without exposing a hint of his own devilment.

Martin realized it all. Jennifer had finished with him. Well—better get the parting over as quickly as possible.

“What is she going to do?” he asked Probyn.

“She is going to head for the Rio d’Oro and take canoes to San Anjo at once. That is Felton’s idea, of course. He is all for haste. He wouldn’t hear of

The Brute

our stopping until we received news about you. We had a quarrel over that. He says it is absolutely imperative to get away at once."

"He is quite right," Martin assented. "There is danger here every minute from Senzala and from Cipriano Bravo, too. Once in San Anjo it will be easy to find a ship and get clear away."

"The disturbing thing is this attitude of hers; her absolute refusal to have you in the party," said Bevis.

"I know," Paul burst out, "and I'll not stand for it. I've no fancy to be lost in a South American jungle for a girl's whim."

"Oh, Felton will take you along all right," said Martin. "Once you reach the Rio d'Oro it is merely a matter of going down stream."

"I don't know that I'm ready to trust our—" Paul felt Martin's glance boring into him. He ended lamely, "Our worthy friend."

"You can trust him to get to the Rio d'Oro as quickly as a man can, for it is over the Fogastian border, which means safety for him."

"I like this as little as I understand it," said Bevis Probyn. "What's behind it? Why this sudden animosity on Jennifer's part? Why this really—well, ugly resolve to leave you in the lurch?"

"I rather expected it," said Martin evenly. "That's all I can say, Bevis."

"You mean that that fellow is an enemy of yours?" said Bevis watching him attentively.

"Yes, we have fallen foul of each other on several occasions. We have no love for each other."

The Dago Prison

“All the same you rescued him,” said Bevis, still watching. “One would say that in mere common gratitude. . . .”

“Well, he—all of you have no need for me now. He is quite right in insisting that the rest of the journey is best done without me. It would only lead to bad blood.”

“It’d be his fault anyhow,” growled Paul. “He’s already made bad blood. That Jennifer should allow her common sense to be affected by a scala—”

“That’s enough, Paul,” said Martin crisply. “It is only natural that his half-sister should share his distaste of me.”

“Well, I don’t,” said Paul. “I’ve had quite enough of the fellow. I’m coming with you, Martin.”

Martin frowned.

“No. You and Bevis must go with Jennifer. There is no question about it. She may need protection. Remember, that until she gets aboard a ship at San Anjo, there’s always danger from Cipriano at least. Don’t argue, Paul, you must go with the ladies. Their lives may depend upon it.”

“But to feel that she has put herself into the hands of that scoun—”

“That’s enough,” said Martin, giving him a peculiar look. “All the more reason why you should go along.”

Bevis, who had been watching shrewdly, said quietly:

“Do you know anything about this Felton, Martin? Can he be trusted?”

The Brute

Martin frowned. Here was a quandary. He could not betray Jennifer's step-brother, but he should warn the others against him.

"You must watch him," he said slowly. "For the sake of his own safety he'll take you straight to the Rio d'Oro, but you must watch him all the time."

"Is that all you can tell us, Martin?" Bevis demanded.

"That is all," said Martin.

"I think I see," said Bevis. He, too, had that sudden intuition which had come to Lilius on the *Evelyn Hope*. He recognized that Felton must be the man Martin Sondes had been hunting on account of his infamies, therefore Martin himself was the "brute" Jennifer had sworn to hate. He stared at Martin. "I think I understand, Martin," he finished. "All the same, do you think Jennifer should go unwarned?"

"Would she believe anything I told her?" asked Martin, understanding him.

"No," agreed Bevis, "I suppose not. "She is headstrong even in her loyalties. Yet, it is rather a grave position."

"I hope not," said Martin. "You see, he's got his skin to save, and a chance of—of making good. After what he has been through he'll probably jump at that. He'll want to get back to civilization and comfort. Still, if you watch him. . . ."

"We'll watch him," said Bevis. He put out his hand. "And I honour you, Martin."

"Tell him, too," said Martin squeezing the hand,

The Dago Prison

“that Cipriano Bravo and the rest—particularly Captain Gonzala—are after you. That will keep him keyed up. I’ll do my best to head that gang off, but the mention of it may be a useful weapon to you.”

“I’ll remember, Martin,” said Bevis. “And may there be better fortune in store for you—soon.”

“What God sends God sends,” said Martin in Portuguese. He turned to superintend the final packing of his animals. He did not look round when the other party rode off, but somehow he knew that Jennifer sat her animal in an attitude that typified repugnance and disdain. When he had finished packing, the party were swallowed by the jungle.

Jennifer had gone and the world seemed horribly blank.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WAY OF CAVALIEROS

IN three days' time the party reached the village on the Rio d'Oro where Ralph Felton told them they would get canoes for their journey downstream.

By that time Jennifer was in a curious state of mind. She was still thinking of Martin Sondes as a monster, as a creature so vilely cruel as to be scarcely human. Or, rather, that was the impression she yet was outwardly holding. Inwardly she was already doubting.

During the first day Ralph had fanned the fires of hate that had sprung up in her when he first made his ugly revelation of Martin's character—Martin's *true* character as he insisted. Jennifer, trusting her half-brother before the world, had blazed in anger against Martin's duplicity. She even believed Felton's story of Martin's plan to get him murdered by his guards. She was helped to believe because she saw at once that Martin must have guessed whom they were rescuing, and had refrained from showing his knowledge. He had done that, Jennifer argued, for his own ugly ends—the murder of Ralph.

She saw the whole of Martin's actions in this light, and thought that explained the strange reticences

The Way of Cavalieros

and sullennesses of the man. Yes, everything in that strange, harsh, changeable manner was explained, and Ralph Felton had touched up and added to every explanation. He had elaborated the picture of Martin Sondes that he had sent home in his letters until he had made of Martin a brute capable of any infamy. With his gift for half-truths and insinuations, he had made the picture as feasible as it was abominable, and Jennifer had believed.

For most of the first day she had been believing, the heat of her reaction against Martin sustaining her. She had refused even to discuss Martin with Bevis and Paul, and had cut short with a biting decision their tentative efforts to bring her to reason and get to the bottom of things.

But towards the end of the first day, in the following night, she was dismayed to find that deep down in her there was a queer rebellious instinct. It would not let her believe that Martin was capable of dishonest or underhanded actions; it seemed to refuse to credit Martin with the crimes Felton accused him of.

The next day that deep-seated rebellion was more powerfully gnawing at her will to hate, reminding her of all Martin's finenesses, demanding of her if such a man could have done the infamous things Felton accused him of. Jennifer hotly told herself that of course he had. But she felt she wasn't really convincing herself. She might have put this down to the betrayal of a heart that had gone out to a brute without reckoning on his character, had not her re-

The Brute

bellion been aided by a growing distaste for her half-brother.

The inevitable disillusionment grew steadily. Felton's very manner was obnoxious, for it was at once cringing and hectoring. Having wormed his way into her good graces, he began to dictate to her with an arrogance that had a tinge of meanness, which made her realize that Martin's curtness had, after all, been a manly thing.

He clashed with Paul on the first day over some small matter, and from then on he worked hard to make bad blood between Jennifer and Paul in the hope of keeping the young man outside her confidence. He lost no opportunity of instilling venom, yet, to Paul himself, he was smiling, charming, friendly. That duplicity rather revolted Jennifer.

There was his reasonless cruelty, too. He handled the animals as though they were insensitive things, slashing at them, spurring them, kicking them with a cold inhuman ferocity. Jennifer checked him and he became meek, swore it was his nerves. But she saw him getting his revenge when he thought her back was turned. He was the same with the peons. He used his hands or his riding whip on them at the slightest provocation. Martin had handled them firmly enough, but she saw that there was all the difference between a just firmness, necessary to counteract a habitual indolence, and Ralph's savagery.

After knocking one man down, he retorted to Jennifer's reprimand:

"Aw! Don't be squeamish, Jenny. You have to

The Way of Cavalieros

treat these dogs like that in this land. You'd never get a stroke of work out of 'em if you didn't. And they'd cut your throat, too, because they'd think you were afraid of 'em. That's the only thing they understand—being mastered."

Jennifer, with a catch at her heart, realized that Martin had been master without being cruel. Also, she had a sudden, terrible twinge of memory . . . the memory of Martin's story of a blackguard who had treated friendly Indians with just Ralph's savagery. She tried not to think that the man in that story had been Ralph—must have been Ralph—it was like this Ralph she was just beginning to know.

Ralph was cruel for the sake of cruelty. He would beat up a man whether he was doing his best or worst, and go on beating. He did this again and again, and, when the reprimand of a mere woman had no effect on him, Paul, who had kept studiously aloof, stepped in. He snatched the fellow's whip from his hand, and threatened to knock his head off unless he behaved himself like a human being.

And Ralph curled up at once. Cruel as he was to those who could not retaliate, he was a wilting coward under a man's threat. . . . And worse than a coward. On the second night, as they camped, a throwing knife had come out of the darkness missing Paul by inches only. They had tried to pretend that one of the peons had thrown it, but Jennifer felt, and she knew that Paul was sure, that it had been Ralph trying to get rid of someone whose honesty he feared.

Steadily the conviction grew on Jennifer that in

The Brute

Ralph there was a settled instinct against anything decent. His treatment of Martin, turning him away at a moment's notice, had not been honest treatment, fair treatment. He had even persuaded Jennifer against an immediate cash payment of what she owed Martin. He had done this with the soundest reasoning. It would be much more sensible to put the money aboard the *Evelyn Hope* in San Anjo, he showed. Yes, that was reasonable, yet Jennifer had the feeling that Ralph hated to part with even a little of the money they carried, that he reasoned from a faint hope that something might happen to prevent payment.

This unlovely attitude of his had reached definite expression when they began to trade for canoes in the little village on the banks of the Rio d'Oro. He actually demanded that they should adopt the outrageous attitude of taking the canoes by force and without payment.

Here Jennifer, trying hard not to remember Martin's story of the treatment of the Indians, put her foot down. They would pay for the canoes at a fair rate or not take them at all. Ralph tried again to reason with her, but she was firm. Liliias, who had occupied her idleness by indulging in an open flirtation with Ralph, and had, strangely, come under his curious spell, also tried to reason with her. But Jennifer was firm much to the exasperation of the sleek woman.

"Why cling to stupid scruples?" Liliias demanded. "It is the custom of the country to do things as Ralph

The Way of Cavalieros

suggests. Do you doubt that your strong, silent captain would not do the same?"

"He wouldn't dream of it," cried Jennifer, and immediately flushed and checked herself, going on coldly: "Whatever the custom of the country is, it is my custom to act with a certain amount of honesty. We will pay for the canoes and carriers at reasonable rates."

But she had merely given Ralph a weapon to defeat her in making such a decision. Ralph declared that the Indians would not let their canoes go at fair prices. After haggling with the *cacique* he came to her and named a sum that was preposterous. Jennifer said as much, and Ralph smugly agreed. But he also insisted that that was the sum the Indians demanded. They doubted his word, but what could they do? Ralph was the only one who could speak the dialect of the Indians. They were helpless.

Ralph and Liliás again urged Jennifer to take the canoes by force rather than be cheated, but she refused to trick her conscience.

"I suppose you won't be happy until your pig-headedness ends in all of us having our throats cut," sneered Liliás. "I suppose the strong, silent captain is answerable for that. If you haven't picked up his ruthlessness you've at least imbibed his obstinacy."

"Both his and my obstinacy would be better named by calling it honesty," said Jennifer sharply.

"I see," jeered Liliás, "and Ralph isn't—well, you're the best judge. He's your brother, at least."

Jennifer saw the point. The mere relationship of

The Brute

Ralph with herself did not make him honourable, so that that basis of her belief in him was without foundation.

Two days they spent wrangling over the matter of the canoes. The peons and the donkeys they had brought with them from Fogasta left them on the return journey. There was no particular need for them to hurry off, yet off they went, and it was only as they left that Bevis discovered that Ralph had sent them away. It was part of his deliberate policy of isolating them, of holding them at his mercy.

Yet Jennifer would not give in; she refused to steal the canoes though they were all getting anxious about the possibility of Cipriano Bravo and his ruffians appearing on the scene. By the end of the second day even Ralph had talked himself dumb, the Indians were still, as he said, unyielding, and the party was divided into two camps, Ralph and Liliás for taking the canoes, the rest for an honest deal.

Paul growled: "I wish I could talk the lingo here, I'd soon settle the thing either way."

"You wouldn't do any good if you did," sneered Ralph. "They wouldn't climb down, and they would resent your methods and probably spear you."

"I think there is a language they will understand," said Jennifer. "I will go to them tomorrow with money in my hand and make them an offer of cash down."

Ralph's sly eyes found the floor.

"Of course, if you are anxious to have all our throats cut that is the way to do it. . . . Let 'em

The Way of Cavalieros

see how rich you are and there'll be no holding 'em. You don't understand conditions here, Jennifer."

"I've learnt enough to know that fair dealing doesn't hurt anyone."

"Who from?" sneered Liliás. "You're not credulous enough to believe Martin Sondes's fairy tales?"

"That cur will lie for his own ends about anything," began Ralph viciously.

"That is enough," said Jennifer. "I am beginning to know a little more about liars than I did before."

Liliás blazed out in fury at that: "You don't deserve any consideration. You don't deserve to have a man looking after you and risking his life and liberty for the sake of your preposterous ideas. You deserve to suffer for your obstinacy."

That, they all thought, was a mere blaze of spit-fire anger. They paid no particular attention to it, until the next morning, when its meaning was only too plain.

Just after dawn they were all awakened by an outcry at the waterside. Bevis and Paul looking out saw all the Indians gathered at the landing stage. The mere sight of them was frightening, for if ever men were mad with fury those Indians were. Something was wrong. They slipped out of their hut to arouse the girls. They roused only Jennifer.

"Liliás," cried Jennifer through the thin walls, "is not here, Bevis. . . . Oh, and her clothes are gone."

Paul came up carrying all the ammunition he could.

"I don't like things," he said. "They seem to be working up for murder by the water there. There's

The Brute

something the matter with their canoes. I saw them pull one out, and it looked as though it had been holed and sunk. . . . For the matter of that, all the canoes seem to have been sunk. I think it will be wise if we take the girls to the shut-up church at the end of the village. It's the only really solid building—bring all the water and food you can."

"There is only one girl," said Jennifer stepping out of the hut. "Lilias has gone—with her clothes."

"Good God!" cried Paul, and by the way he stared, she knew that something ugly had happened.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"Felton's gone, too, with all *his* clothes—and all the money," he said.

Bevis gave a hard laugh. "The cur! I suspected this was his filthy work." He caught the question in Jennifer's glance. "He's given us the slip with Lilias and all the money—taken canoes, of course, perhaps forced Indians to work them. And he's sunk the rest of the canoes. That'd be his logic. It prevents pursuit, you see—but, by Heaven! he's left us to face the music without a penny, without any adequate means of defending ourselves against these enraged Indians. And—and we rescued him! Love of Heaven, was there ever a cad more callous!"

"I doubt whether there is another to equal him," cried Paul savagely. "He's an utter scoundrel. . . . Oh, you'd better know it, Jennifer. He tried to kill Martin Sondes even as Martin was getting him out of that prison. You've got to recognize that he's a skunk. . . ."

The Way of Cavalieros

“I do,” said Jennifer dazedly. “I’ve been recognizing it for days. But we must do something now. We must try and at least save you two from the consequences of my folly.”

They were rather lucky. The Indians were too occupied with their rage to turn their attention from their damaged canoes. Also, they probably assumed that all the whites had bolted. The little party was able to get a fair supply of food and water and all their guns and ammunition to the small mud church before they were seen. But they were seen. A woman raised the alarm as Paul staggered towards the church with two kerosene tins of water. He refused to drop those tins and in consequence had only reached the door as a seven-foot arrow buried itself in the woodwork a bare six inches from his shoulder.

Bevis snatched him inside, and they began to pile chairs and a confessional against the door. The mob of Indians yelled madly and hurled themselves at the church. Old guns and modern revolvers banged off, and slugs and nickel-coated shots crashed through the wood.

Then in a pile the savages were at the door, clawing at it, hammering at it, slashing at it with knives and hatchets. A rotten chair wedged under the handle split and broke, the door sagged open. The confessional and the pile of chairs began to slide. Brown arms, fierce, brown faces forced a way through the crack. The little church was made infernal with furious, shrill cries, and the clatter of falling things. A throwing knife whizzed by Paul’s head as he la-

The Brute

boured, sweating, to keep the barricade of chairs firm. A long knife in a lean hand slashed at Bevis. There was the thud of hurling bodies on the door. . . . Then the chairs came down in a grand slide. The barricade was crumbling. . . . Indians forced their way through the door. It was all up. . . .

Abruptly the tiny building was filled with thunder. It roared and clamoured, beating back and back again from wall to wall. It ran through a sharp, terrifying burst of seven sharp claps. . . . Jennifer was firing her automatic. The stab of the flame and the crash of the bullets through the woodwork of the door gave a touch of the infernal to the noise in that confined space. The Indians yelled in fright, and absolutely fought their way out of the church. Paul and Bevis hurled the door shut, swung the confessional against it, and securely wedged the confessional with chairs.

"Well done, Jennifer," Bevis cried, when they stood back panting and drenched in perspiration. "That shooting came at the psychological moment. I wonder whether you hit anybody."

"Not one," she smiled shakily. "I aimed high. To kill after what we have brought to them was unthinkable."

"We don't want to hurt them," said Bevis, "but I'm afraid we'll have to."

The Indians were coming again. Their shrill cries sounded all round the building. A crackle of shots snapped out, and the remnants of glass in one of the windows burst to pieces with a harsh clap. Arrows

The Way of Cavalieros

and great stones crashed through other windows. Outside another window there came a tumult of men gathered together, and the scrape of poles on the sill. Paul and Bevis stood ready for the men who were to mount to it. There was a sharp cry from Jennifer. They looked round. Two Indians hacking at another window had crashed through and were leaping into the church, as others climbed to the window behind them.

“Watch this side!” yelled Paul, and he leaped across the church. As he did so, his pistol spoke and glass and mud flew from a window with such fury that the men who had climbed there fell over backwards in a frightened, screaming bunch. The other two men crouched ready to kill Paul. One stood with a spear poised, one with a cruel, cutting knife. Paul darted forward, paused in his jump, side-stepped. . . .

The spear hissed by harmlessly, the man springing with the knife missed. He wriggled round to strike again. His companion reached for his knife. Paul was on them. He had snatched a chair as he sprang. In his strong grip the chair swept at the men. One man went over sprawling. The other was flung five feet and crashed against the wall. The man on the floor did not rise. The man against the wall turned like a puma and tried to dive in under the chair. He got under it; his knife arm shortened. He was on Paul. Paul let go the chair in the air, his left fist, already crooking, was followed in a flash by the right. The Indian taking the left on the chin was

The Brute

already dropping under the knock-out, when the right tore home. He reached the ground a fraction before the falling chair which came down on the back of his head.

Bevis on his side was firing his pistol.

Two of the three windows in his wall were already full of men. So was one on Paul's side. Men were swarming up eager to get in and kill the whites. They had realized that the whites' bullets did not hit; being savages they decided that that was because the whites could not shoot straight. Paul and Bevis realized this at once when their firing was met without fear. They knew that unless they took drastic steps they would be swamped and killed—and, above all, Jennifer would fall into those barbarous hands. At the same instant they both chose the same course. They fired deliberately, carefully. Two men screamed in pain. Two men, one with blood streaming from a shoulder, one with a broken leg, fell backward on to the heads of others trying to mount. . . . As though by magic the windows cleared.

They stood, after tying up the two stunned men, in a strange, disturbing silence, waiting for the next attack. None came. Five minutes passed. They felt a great relief. Ten—they began to get anxious.

“What are they up to, confound them?” growled Paul. “If we could only see.”

“Yes,” said Jennifer, “if we could only see—” Then she laughed. “But of course we can. We're forgetting the belfry.”

She moved towards the little door by the porch.

The Way of Cavalieros

Bevis stopped her and, picking up a box of cartridges, went up the steps himself. There was silence for another minute. Then they heard his voice shouting: "Bring up a Winchester, Jennifer."

Immediately his pistol began to whip-snap; slow, careful explosions that came to Paul in the church with a queer disembodied sound. It was like stage shooting heard "off" . . . queer, unnatural. He climbed up in the pulpit where he obtained a greater command of all windows and some cover. Nothing, however, appeared at the windows. The noise of the automatic gave place to the crack of the rifle. Then angry shouting arose outside. The Winchester cracked steadily. The noise of a pistol joined it. . . . Jennifer, of course, and firing right through a clip in machine-gun fashion. The shouting outside grew in volume. There was some firing of guns from the Indians and Paul fancied he heard the thud of missiles against the walls. Then the shouting died down. Then the shooting stopped. The world was uncannily silent.

Jennifer's heels came tapping down the stairs. She came into the church, her face bright with elation.

"That drove them off," she smiled. "Bevis want's a drink—hot work up there. And then we must try and get some sort of breakfast."

"But what happened?" asked Paul.

"You get a splendid view from the belfry," she said, "all round. They were bringing up a lot of tree trunks when Bevis opened fire. We think they meant to batter down the door and also lean the trunks

The Brute

against the windows so that they could run them up easily. They were too far away for Bevis to hit accurately with his pistol—that was why he wanted the Winchester. He's an awfully good shot, Paul. First he put bullets into the trunks about a foot from the first man. Then when that didn't stop them he shot the leading men through arms or legs. That raised the uproar. They tried to rush from all sides. . . . That's why I took a hand. I didn't hit anyone, but I helped that scared feeling along. Bevis got about five of them before they decided it was better to keep their distance. They have retired to the *cacique's* hut for a council of war."

They were left alone until afternoon. The council of Indians went on solemnly. From the belfry they could see the sprawled little village of huts, some of them no more than palm-leaf roofs on corner-poles. Behind, the jungle came down greedily, as though eager to lick up in its wild life this village. At one corner of the village the river slipped by with a glitter that was indeed almost gold, like its name. From their vantage post they could see why the Indians had every reason to be angry. Each canoe had been sunk at its moorings, not even a couple of clumsy freight *batelao* had been spared. Ralph Felton had been at least thorough in his villainy.

Just before noon they saw a stir amid the Indians, and a body of men went off into the jungle. But nothing further happened, for the rest of the village crawled into the shade as the heat of the siesta hour came down and went to sleep. Jennifer and Bevis

The Way of Cavalieros

went to sleep, too, and Paul, on guard, was on the nod when suddenly groups of men appeared, one by one, from behind the houses and approached the church. They were unarmed, and the leaders held their hands above their heads in token of peace. Paul showed his gun, after calling down to the others, and bade the men stand at a distance. Two or three Indians began to talk at once, making gestures, and on Bevis arriving in the belfry, Paul said:

“Can’t make out what the deuce they want. They aren’t dangerous as they aren’t armed and haven’t any hope of getting through the windows. They may even be friendly. . . . Can you understand what they are jabbering about?”

“Not a thing,” said Bevis. “What are those cylinders they have in their hands?”

“Don’t know,” said Paul. “Thought it might be kerosene to burn us out, but they look like sections of bamboo. Seem harmless—might even be presents. . . . I say.” He brought his rifle up and fired. But too late. The Indians who had crowded closer and closer as their leaders had talked, abruptly started to action. Every man carrying a cylinder heaved it suddenly through the church windows. Then every man jack of the crowd bolted.

From below they heard Jennifer cry out. And they waited with sick hearts for some sort of explosion. Nothing came. Why were these bombs (as they thought) so slow in detonating? Paul started down in the hope of doing something, he knew not what. He heard Jennifer laughing.

The Brute

He came upon her at the bottom of the stairs.

"It's absurd," she cried, "just ants."

"Ants?" he cried, wondering if he had heard right.

"Look at them," she said, pointing, "thousands of ants. All those things they threw in split as they hit the ground, and out came the ants. It's very foolish. Do they expect ants to drive us into the open?"

Paul looked into the church. It was true. Each of the canisters had contained ants, the big *tucandeira* ant that bites so savagely and quite frequently gives fever. They were swarming all over the floor, thousands of them—tens of thousands. Paul was almost amused at the sight—but not quite. He guessed the Indians had not thrown ants into the church for nothing. He ran up the steps to Bevis, but before he had got half-way he heard him firing. The Indians were attacking from all sides. They were screaming their war cries, firing into the church with their old guns, sending showers of arrows towards the belfry. Paul forgot about ants in the more urgent matter of the human attack. For over an hour he stood back to back with Bevis, stalling off threatening onslaughts with a few, well-placed shots. Those shots were very persuasive, for the Indians showed a marked tendency to keep well out of range and under cover. They only ventured on a concerted attack when they thought the defense was growing less alert. Even these assaults were rather feeble and no attempt was made to push them home. Indeed, Paul and Bevis grew puzzled at their tactics, and Paul suddenly said: "You know, they're not really meaning

The Way of Cavalieros

anything. They simply want to keep us on the jig. They're playing with us."

"My opinion, too," said Bevis. "We'd better ease up or they'll wear us out as well as make us fire off all our ammunition. By the way, what did they throw into the church?"

"Nothing of consequence," said Paul. "Just a few thousand ants. What their idea might be I don't—"

"Ants," cried Bevis, starting up. . . .

At that moment Jennifer was calling to them.

"Paul. . . . Bevis. . . . Our food. The ants are destroying it."

It was true. Paul and Bevis rushed down to the church, sending Jennifer up on guard. They saw that all the ants had concentrated on one spot. They were swarming over the store of food. A greedy, tigerish mass was fighting, burrowing and devouring their small stock of eatables. Paul was dismayed at the destruction they had wrought in even an hour. The food seemed to be vanishing piecemeal before their eyes as a stream of ants carried fragments out through a crevice in the wall. And he realized, too, that, having located the food and having found a way back to their nest, through that crevice, not merely the ants the Indians had flung into the church, but the whole local ant-colony was busy removing the plunder. It seemed to Paul that hundreds of thousands of ants were at work removing the food. And he understood the whole plan of the Indians. The throwing of the ants into the church, the faked attacks to distract attention had all been for one end.

The Brute

The Indians had aimed to destroy their food supply the quicker to starve them out.

It was a very clever and a very ugly plan. In the few seconds in which Paul and Bevis recognized the intention of the Indians, they saw how near they were to disaster. With their food gone they would be completely at the mercy of the village in a few days, and the villagers need only sit down and wait for their defeat. Grasping the situation both men dashed at the food pile and strove to beat the ants off. It was useless. It was like an attempt to beat back the sea. Then they tried snatching packages and pieces of food from the dwindling pile, and running with them to the belfry.

That was of little avail. The ants had burrowed into every package, and as they carried them, they dropped out and left a trail towards the belfry. And that trail was fatal. With the almost uncanny instinct of their kind the ants were on the track of the food, a stream of them immediately headed for the belfry.

There was another thing, too. Both men were bitten, Bevis so savagely that he dropped his parcel. He warned Paul against this: "These are the ants of which the Brazilians say, 'Four bites from them bring death.' I don't think they can do that, but I know they can bring fever. I've seen it. . . . And we don't want that."

"With Jennifer here—no," said Paul. "But what are we going to do? If they get our food and we starve—that will bring death, too."

The Way of Cavalieros

“We might try some sort of fire ring,” said Bevis vaguely. But they never did. Jennifer shouted to them, and began firing rapidly. They had to run up to her to resist what looked like a real attack. It may not have been one, but only another demonstration to distract them from the work of the ants. But it seemed so real that they felt certain that if the Indians saw any weakness they would take advantage of it to force their way into the church.

They had to fight the savages off, and as they fought, the swarms of ants destroyed the precious store of food beneath them.

CHAPTER XXII

FELTON PROVES HIMSELF

BY five o'clock the fighting died down. But they had already guessed that this was because the Indians were certain of their fate. An examination of the food pile made this apparent. The amazing ants had done their work well. Capable of stripping the carcass of a horse bare to the bones in a few hours, they had practically wiped out the food supply. The little garrison knew they were beaten. They could only discuss their chances of fighting their way out at night while realizing the hopelessness of it. With canoes they might have stood a sporting chance, without them they would have to take to the jungle where their own ignorance, and the woodsman skill of the Indians made it certain that they would be helpless victims.

They crouched in the belfry staring down at an apparently peaceful village, where the arts of an idle life were going on serenely. They watched the women cooking, and tried not to react to the tantalizing odours of many meals that floated up to them. They realized that those odours were part of the savage plan, and that as their hunger grew they would suffer tortures that might well drive them into their enemy's hands.

About six o'clock, however, the peaceful picture

Felton Proves Himself

gave place to another, one so exciting that suddenly they thrilled with hope.

One of the Indians seemed to give the alarm, and there was much bustle and running towards that place where the trail left the dark womb of the jungle and entered the village clearing. All the braves snatched up their weapons and moved out as though to give battle; Indians in ones and twos slid into the darkness of the bush. There was a tingling atmosphere of fear and imminent fighting.

Then men came quickly from the screen forest depths, spoke quickly to the massed braves—and struck panic into them. There was a scurrying and fluttering of anxious men. Everywhere the Indians bolted back to huts and fires. Like magic all weapons disappeared and the Indians lolled with ostentatious peacefulness about their fires. The watchers thrilled. Jennifer almost called out in thanksgiving. To her this strange fear in the Indians meant only one thing. Only one man could have that powerful effect. . . . Martin.

Martin Sondes had followed them. Martin Sondes was riding up to the rescue. The force of his personality was already dominating the savages.

Armed peons with donkeys and pack animals appeared at the edge of the jungle. . . . Martin's peons and donkeys, Jennifer was sure. A big man showed in the shadows. There was somehow a touch of the seafaring in his pose that made Jennifer's heart call—Martin! Martin! For a minute he stood surveying the village. Others rode up behind him. Two

The Brute

others. With the briefest consultation one of the others took the lead, rode into the sunlight.

They saw the long, thin, cadaverous figure of Cipriano Bravo. The fat bulk of Pascobas lurched behind. The big man Jennifer had taken for Martin was Gonzala, the captain of the *Donna Diaba*.

With more apprehension than joy they watched the three ruffians ride at the head of their strong and well-armed train into the village. With a swagger Cipriano drew up at the hut of the *cacique*. As the Indian chief came cringing forward they could guess from his attitude Bravo's ugly reputation.

In twenty minutes the Latin-American party was before the church, and Jennifer, Bevis and Paul were leaving it. As Jennifer came out Cipriano stared at her with mocking gallantry, and, with wonderful grace, swung his hat from his saintlike head.

"Good day, and the blessing of Heaven upon you, senhorita," he said. "It was written that I could not be separated long from one so lovely."

It was useless to attempt any sort of fight. Even Paul, the headstrong, saw that their position was hopeless. About them stood Cipriano's men with weapons held ready, behind them the angry Indians. Cipriano, smiling, seemed to sense their thoughts. With the courtliness of a nobleman he begged to be allowed to relieve them of the burden of their weapons. There was no hope of resisting. They handed their guns over.

"There are things I do not understand, senhorita," the rogue with the saint's face went on. "This bad

Felton Proves Himself

quarrel you had with our good Senhor Martino, for instance.”

“Who said that we quarrelled?” said Bevis curtly.

“Surely it must be that,” said the rogue. “Martino would not leave you here without good reason.”

Jennifer heard this rogue’s testimonial to Martin with burning cheeks.

Pascobas said with a leer: “There was another woman. The *cacique* says she went with the man. It is easy to understand all—she was very beautiful, too, that other one.”

“Ah, easy to see, senhorita,” said Cipriano, with his detestable smile, “how the beauty of your adorable sex makes willing victims of even the strongest of us.”

Jennifer was shocked to realize that they thought Martin had fallen a victim to Liliás’s seductions. Shocked to discover that they thought it was Martin who had bolted with the canoes and left them in the lurch. She was about to speak when the big seaman, Gonzala, said:

“Even for a woman or for profit, Martin Sondes would not take canoes without payment, nor coerce four Indians to work for him against their will. That is not the man.”

“No,” said Jennifer firmly. “That was not Martin Sondes. That was another man who joined our party. Martin Sondes left us three days before we reached this village.”

“So, you sent him away as early as that,” said Cipriano. “Well, that is a happy omen for us, at

The Brute

least." His wolfish eyes dwelt upon her lingeringly. "It places upon me the happy duty of caring for beauty in the wilderness."

"Need this talk go any further?" asked Bevis in a harsh voice. "We have told you all there is to tell, senhor."

"Perhaps you are right," the ruffian sneered. "Later we will expand our friendship in greater charm." His beautiful eyes stared straight into Jennifer's with a meaning that chilled and frightened. "Now, business must come before even the call of loveliness. There is the little matter of the gold you carried to discuss. Our first thoughts, naturally were for its safety in so barbarous a place. But, since we have looked through your baggage we have perceived that you, too, had that wise idea, and have hidden it securely. One would therefore respectfully ask you to lead us to that place so that we can be assured of its security."

Jennifer's lips tightened as the man spoke. Bevis, recognizing that Cipriano was not one to be played with, said quietly: "The money is gone, senhor. We no longer have it."

Cipriano stared at them for a full minute. They saw the beauty of his face slowly give way to lines of tigerish cruelty. With eyes narrow and glittering, he said softly: "You do not understand me, senhor. I am asking for that money. I will get that money. I have methods quite infallible for extracting information."

They could not doubt it. Cipriano Bravo would

Felton Proves Himself

not hesitate to torture them in order to get the secret of the money's hiding place—if he thought it were hidden.

Jennifer shuddered. Bevis said as quietly as the ruffian: "Senhor mistakes my utterance. When I say we no longer have the money, I am telling you that it has been taken from us."

Cipriano's eyes blazed: "Taken! You mean it has been stolen."

Jennifer made as though to speak, but it was no time to shield Felton. Bevis said firmly: "That is the truth. It has been stolen—all of it."

"Pah!" snarled Gonzala. "This is but a trick. Who would steal it? Never Martin Sondes."

Again Jennifer winced at this testimony from a rogue to Martin's uprightness. She found herself defending Martin.

"Certainly it was not Senhor Martino," she said. "It was that man who has gone off and left us. . . . That man and the woman."

"And you would have us go after them, and you would then get away," sneered Cipriano, his hot eyes on her. "We do not believe that story so very quickly."

"Then you must be a fool," snapped Bevis hotly. "Do you think we would have waited here—for you, with the money if we could have helped it?"

"I have seen that all the canoes are sunk, and that would have been a hindrance," Pascobas sniggered.

"Who sunk them but a thief anxious not to be

The Brute

pursued?" said Bevis. "He went off last night with the money and the other woman, leaving us—who did not want to face you—to face you and the angry Indians. Don't you see the truth of it?"

"It is certainly logical," said Cipriano with a cruel bitterness. He exchanged a few words with the *cacique* of the village, whose vehemence and rage in reply obviously confirmed all Paul had said. The ruffian turned slow eyes on the girl again: "And who is this strange robber who joins your party so easily and unexpectedly, does all the bargaining with the *cacique* here, and then vanishes so readily with your money?"

"He is a man we came to rescue from jail in Senzala," said Bevis quietly. "The money was to bribe the jailers, but Senhor Martino managed to effect his escape without bribing. Senhor Martino then left us, and the rescued man brought us here to get canoes for San Anjo. But he went off and left us, as you see."

"Again it sounds logical," said Cipriano bitterly. "Who is this man who takes what Cipriano Bravo wanted?"

"His name would mean nothing to you. It is English, Ronald Buckingham."

"'Logical,' he says," Gonzala burst out. "An Englishman has stolen, he says. Pah! I do not believe it. Do sane people fondle a serpent? And if they do, do they close their eyes to the fact that nature intends it to bite? Can you expect us to credit you to be the boon companions of thieves."

Felton Proves Himself

“We did not know,” began Bevis. “He was a man we had known. . . .”

“He was my half-brother, that is why he was with us,” said Jennifer, too proud to shield her shame behind silence or ambiguity; too proud to realize that, as Bevis Probyn’s gesture warned, her words were rash.

“So—” said Cipriano in a silky voice, and that voice seemed to have lost its respect as his eyes had become bold. “So—the sister of a rascal? Only that, after all. But of course—most beautiful.”

His tone was ominous. He was talking, they felt, to an equal, even an inferior. And since that inferior was beautiful, and he was a Latin-American male whose regard for women was of Oriental condition, the unpleasant intention of his interest was manifest. Pascobas noted it and leered. Only Gonzala was a little perturbed, not because Cipriano was amative, but because he was in danger of being unbusinesslike.

“You will not forget,” he growled, “that she is undoubtedly rich. There may be profit in that, even though we have lost the money.”

“Cipriano does not forget,” breathed the other, not taking his eyes off Jennifer who, though frightened, maintained a firm dignity. “Rich—and there are ways through the heart, even, of tasting these riches.”

Bevis Probyn almost risked striking the fellow down, for he thought he understood his meaning. Martin had warned them that a girl like Jennifer might be held for ransom, but Cipriano was hinting

The Brute

at something more unlovely. Bevis remembered that Latin-American law laid it down that upon marriage the estates of the husband and wife became one, to be shared and controlled equally. Was this brute thinking along these lines? No good saying it was incredible, that such a marriage could not happen. They were not supported by civilized safeguards now, but in the wilds of South America where anything could happen, and at the mercy of an utterly reckless scoundrel who acknowledged no law save that which he himself dictated.

It was with difficulty that Bevis held his hands and maintained an air of calmness under this hint of horror. It was for the sake of all their lives that he kept himself in hand, though he cursed himself for ever letting Martin leave the party. He should have joined Paul in insisting that Martin should stay, even though it meant an open rupture with Jennifer.

And Jennifer, too, was feeling that Martin's going was a fatal mistake. She had imperilled not merely herself, but these two staunch men beside her. She felt instinctively the ghastly plan Cipriano had in his mind, and she knew, too, that it might cause the death of Bevis and Paul in resisting it. Nevertheless, she kept her high courage, and deliberately turning her back on Cipriano, said to Bevis:

"I leave you to discuss matters with this person. He does not seem to know how to bear himself before a woman."

Cipriano threw back his head and laughed, the noiseless laugh of a wolf.

Felton Proves Himself

“So, she has spirit—but that is how I like women.” His hand went out as she passed him, caught her slim wrist and wrenched her round so that they stood face to face. “I shall tame you,” he said, “and adore you in taming; you will whisper softly and sweetly enough in good time.”

He felt something snatch at his side, felt the big bulk of a man beside him. He glared sidelong, and into Paul’s eyes. And as he met that angry and determined glance he felt the prick of a knife point just under the base of his ribs. And Paul Glen’s voice said harshly:

“This is your knife I have in my hand. You yourself know its capacities for going deep. Let that lady go.”

Cipriano tried to stare Paul down. He failed.

“You are asking to be cut to pieces by my men?” he snarled.

“What matter? You will be dead first. Loose your hand.” The voice suddenly grew sharp, imperative. “Do you hear? Let that lady go. And do not move.”

Cipriano made no mistake. He glared, but he let Jennifer go. And he stood rigid. That knife was against his body, ready to be pushed home by a strong hand at the slightest movement. When Jennifer had gained her hut, Paul stood back and handed Cipriano his knife.

The man stared, and then smiled.

“I recognize and admire the courage of that action, senhor,” he said gracefully, “but in the abstract

The Brute

alone. It pains me that your brave gesture will avail you nothing. In my avocation it is well recognized that brave men are admirable—but dangerous. And that dangerous men are best dead. And there are two of you. You will realize that it is merely wisdom to remove you.” He put his knife back into its sheath, drew his pistol. “Are you agnostics, senhors, or do you pray? You have two minutes to regain or confirm your faith.”

Pascobas, breathing heavily, touched his arm.

“Folly, Cipriano. If the girl is rich, it is obvious that these English milords are rich also. They have families which would pay to have them preserved intact. Why be wasteful?

“Yes, there is that,” said Cipriano hesitating. “But no—while they live they will be a constant anxiety. You know what these English are. They are never content to remain prisoners quietly—especially when there is a woman to rescue. It will free us from much uncertainty to be finished with them.”

He balanced his pistol delicately, waiting for the end of the two minutes. Paul and Bevis, very white and breathing quietly, awaited their end.

Bevis, facing the river, said in a shaking voice:

“Heavens, the canoes are coming back.”

All swung to face the river. Gonzala said with an accent almost of relief: “It is so, by the saints. They are heading here.”

“They are not the canoes we want,” said Cipriano. “See, only Indians are in them.”

“But see, too,” cried Pascobas, “that there are four

Felton Proves Himself

Indians and they are in the first canoe only. While the second, which they tow, is empty. Santa Barbara, this has but one meaning. Those are the canoes in which the thief and that woman escaped with the money."

"There is no doubt about it," said Gonzala. "Perhaps you will cease play-acting now, Cipriano."

Cipriano was already carried away by excitement. He forgot all about Paul and Bevis and hurried to the river bank. Paul found that he was trembling now that a respite had been granted them.

The Indians who came in the canoes were, indeed, the men Felton had forced to take him down to San Anjo.

They told how in the dead of night and at the pistol point they had been driven to load the canoes with heavy packets and forced to paddle at a great pace down the river. In the early morning light, exhausted, they had landed on an island in the middle of the broad stream, and Felton had driven them harshly to make a fire, boil water and cook food.

This had been the undoing of Felton and Liliás. The Indians, angered by their treatment, were determined to escape. One of them, a fisherman, carried in his girdle some root of a plant the natives throw into lagoons when they want to stupefy fish and catch them.

The root was put into the boiling coffee and quite soon the man and the woman were unconscious, stupefied by the drug. There was nothing fatal about it; they were simply robbed of their senses for a few

The Brute

hours. While they were in that condition the Indians took the canoes and returned upstream to their village.

On hearing this Cipriano ran to the canoes to get the packets of money. They were not there. In a blaze of anger he turned on the Indians demanding what they had done with them. He was further enraged when he was told the packets had been left on the island with the drugged man and woman. The Indians would not steal anything from white men. They knew from experience that that would mean a fire-boat coming up from San Anjo and firing into and burning their village.

As the Indians explained this Cipriano struck the leader to the earth, and was about to shoot the man when Gonzala interfered.

"You are being senseless," he growled. "If these men left the runaways on the island and brought away the canoes they must still be there—with the money."

"Pah!" snarled Cipriano, "they will have escaped."

"Not if the stream is broad—and there are alligators about," said Gonzala.

He asked the Indians if this was not the case, and was told that escape was impossible from the island. Not only were there alligators in the broad waters between the island and the main banks, but the river was also full of piranha, the cannibal fish that will tear a human being to pieces. The fugitives were as secure on the island as though they were barred in a prison. There was nothing on the island to help them reach the river bank.

Felton Proves Himself

Cipriano immediately ordered two of the Indians back into the first canoe.

“We will go and pluck this fruit waiting so ripely for us,” he said. “Pascobas had better come with us, for he is unreliable as a guard, yet sometimes useful as a navigator. You, Gonzala, who have a firm hand, will take charge of our captives. Watch them well. If you should have reason to shoot the two men, I shall not be greatly afflicted. But the woman—remember that, in addition to being beautiful, she is also rich. Be warned that I hold you responsible, Gonzala, and I am not a man to warn lightly.”

His terrible and saintly smile was fixed for a moment on Gonzala, and even that redoubtable brute flinched under it. Cipriano Bravo was not the most-feared scoundrel in these lands for nothing. Cipriano himself knew how he was appreciated. His smile deepened as he took his place in a canoe.

They watched the two canoes out of sight; then Bevis and Paul joined Jennifer, who had come out of her shack, explaining to her what had happened. They could give her the story fully because Cipriano had acted as interpreter for the sake of Pascobas, who could not understand the Indians' dialect.

“How long will they be away,” asked Jennifer.

“Until tomorrow midday, at least,” said Bevis. “I don't suppose they'll get to the island before dawn.”

“And us?” said Jennifer. “Can we do anything?”

They looked about them, at the dagos, who sat apparently not greatly interested, but with their weapons ready in their hands.

The Brute

"I'm afraid we can't do anything," said Bevis. "It's shooting if we attempt to bolt, and even if we escape we'll be greenhorns, unarmed and unskilled, lost in the jungle."

"Even that," said Jennifer with a shudder, "will be better than facing that man again."

"That's so," said Bevis slowly, but not very hopefully. "We must keep our wits about us. If any chance arises we must take it."

Paul suggested, with a desperate effort of optimism:

"Perhaps Cipriano won't come back. Felton is armed. He won't give himself up cheaply."

Jennifer answered with a sudden and extraordinary bitterness:

"No, *he* won't fight. Not he. You can't count on any help from him."

The men were stricken silent by this abrupt revelation of her appreciation of her half-brother's real character. She went on as though she recognized that she owed them an apology.

"I can't ask you to forgive me for bringing this trouble upon you. I see it was my fault now. I believed a man who was entirely untrustworthy instead of one who was entirely reliable. I think, though I was wrong-headed, that I always knew in my heart, that if Martin Sondes did hunt Ralph Felton down, as Ralph declared, he had good reason."

"Good heavens!" cried Paul, for he had not realized this. "So that's why you turned on him, Jenni-

Felton Proves Himself

fer? I wish I'd known that, for I'd have told you straight——”

“I guessed as much, Jennifer,” Probyn said quietly. “But only on the day he left us.”

“I wanted to tell you what Felton was,” said Paul. “Only—only——”

“Only Martin Sondes wouldn't let you,” Jennifer answered. “I know. That is the sort of man he is. He allowed me to think the worst of him rather than that I—a silly, headstrong, little fool—should suffer. I'm beginning to understand him. But—but I wish he had spoken out straight.”

“Would you have listened, Jennifer?” Bevis Probyn asked. She stared, coloured a little.

“You're right, Bevis,” she said quietly. “He was right. He understood me. I wouldn't have listened. What a little fool I've been.”

“It's no good dwelling on that,” said Probyn. “We've got the present to consider.”

“I struck him—struck him on the face,” she said, with a half sob. “And all the time he was only thinking of me, protecting me. Well, I deserve all I get.”

“He wouldn't subscribe to that,” Bevis told her. “Meanwhile, we've got to keep stiff upper-lips, and be ready to seize any chance.”

“Yes,” she said. “And don't be afraid for me, you two dears. If anything, it is going to be easiest for me.”

“Easiest!” Bevis exclaimed, raising his brows.

“I am not unarmed,” she said softly. “They

The Brute

haven't taken my small revolver from me. If the worst comes to the worst——”

They stared at her in horror and understanding, pale and fearful, yet both recognizing that Jennifer must be prepared to face this last grim extremity.

As they stared, Gonzala rolled across to them with two armed men at his heels.

“Senhors,” he said quietly, “you must stop talking with the senhorita now. You must go to a hut at the end of the village.”

The two men regarded him with chilled hearts. They had already decided that Gonzala had, according to his lights, a certain seamanlike decency. They also realized that he could be quite ruthless and was not to be trifled with. He meant to separate them, and that meant that their chance of escaping was not merely lessened, but—since they would not think of leaving Jennifer behind—made almost impossible. Gonzala smiled courteously but implacably.

“It is not pleasant to one of my nature to shoot, or even to order the shooting of unarmed men, senhors,” he announced. “I beg of you to give me no reason for performing so distasteful a task.”

He stared at them once again, turned, and led the way to the hut that was to be their prison.

CHAPTER XXIII

INTOLERABLE SAMARITANS

RALPH FELTON and Liliás Seyler recovered from the effects of the drug about five o'clock, only to find themselves marooned on their island. It was only when they found that they had been tricked and deserted by the Indians that Liliás began to realize the true character of Felton.

She had, perhaps, at first joined forces with him because she was not popular with the others, and she saw in him a way both of annoying her companions and effecting an escape from them. Queerly, however, what was at first a mocking friendship had gradually changed, as the fascination that Ralph Felton had exerted over many women held her under a spell. This queer magnetism seemed not only to rob her of a critical faculty that would have been damaging to him in the ordinary way, but actually to put her under a hypnotic influence. She shared with him his anger against Jennifer, because Jennifer would not stoop to robbing the Indians. She felt no sense of guilt when they ran off in the night leaving the others at the mercy of the Indians. It was true that she did not know that the rest of the canoes had been sunk, or, until they were well on the way, that Ralph Felton had stolen the money, for he had not called her from the hut until he was ready to start. But

The Brute

even when she realized he had the money, her spell-bound conscience did not rebel. Jennifer was a rich woman, the loss of the money would mean little to her, and, anyhow, she had been prepared to spend all of it on Ralph for bribes. . . . He was simply getting direct what would have been his indirectly.

She was not actually worried by the moral side, particularly as she felt that the others had merely to follow them downstream in canoes to San Anjo; thus at first she was inclined to treat this being marooned on an island as part of a bold and gay adventure. She declared that they weren't going to be beaten by a set of mangy Indians, or anyone else. They could deal with the situation triumphantly. Felton snarled at her and told her not to be a romantic fool.

But she persisted in being a romantic fool. She hoped to win back his good humour that way. She said it would all be very simple. They would hide the money in some cunning place, so that they could come back and find it at their leisure. And when they had concealed it they would make the mainland.

"I can swim, and I'm sure you can, Ralph," she said. "We'll put our clothes in a bundle on our heads and swim across in the authentic story-book way."

He glared at her with a sour and savage sneer.

"Yes, you're a fool," he snarled. "See that log over there."

"Good," cried Lilius softly. "You've solved the business with your quicker brain, Ralph. That'll ferry us across."

"It will," Felton snapped. "Inside! It's an alli-

Intolerable Samaritans

gator. The river swarms with them. And look at this——”

He picked up a piece of meat and threw it out into the stream. For a moment it floated. Then the water all about it was beaten into a mad flurry. Hundreds of small fish seemed to be fighting to get at that meat, hurling themselves on it and snapping at it like hungry wolves.

“The piranha,” sneered Ralph. “They’d find you a tender morsel, Liliias. They’d tear you to pieces with tiny bites of razor-edged teeth. Feel inclined for that swim?”

Liliias, staring at that furious exhibition of cannibalism, staring at the loglike alligators, was appalled. Ralph Felton went on in a whining, peevish voice—a voice that told Liliias he was shaking with fear:

“We’re trapped, that’s the long and the short of it. Those cursed Indians doped us in this very place, knowing we couldn’t get away. Trapped! What a darn fool I was to bring a woman along!” He glared at Liliias. “It’s your fault. If it hadn’t been for you I’d have made ’em go on. Driven ’em on until I was safe. Just you wanting to stop an’ flirt an’ be romantic on an island——”

Liliias stared at him, revolted.

“Don’t rail like an imbecile,” she said, curtly; “use your mind. We’ll get off if you only think how. What about pushing that fallen tree trunk into the river and floating across on it?”

He eyed her with sly, foxy eyes

“And in the middle of the stream you lose your

The Brute

nerve, and overbalance us, and the alligators and the piranha get us. Pretty idea, that!"

"Perhaps you have a better!" she said curtly.

His pale eyes were watching her every moment.

"We'll go round the island," he said. "We may find something. Sometimes there's a strand of creeper as strong as a cable hanging across the river. Or there might be a more practicable trunk in the water. Anyhow, we'll walk round, and find out how we are situated. You go to the left, I'll go to the right."

Lilias had not gone ten yards before she realized what walking in the real, pathless jungle meant. After fighting her way over slimy mangue roots, and struggling in a swamp that came up to her knees, she turned and glanced back—and could not trace the way she had come. She seemed lost, caged. Through leaves on one side she saw the brown, sediment-thick water of the river sliding by with an oily ripple. On every other side the great trees, with their dripping curtain of vines, formed a living wall. It seemed to her that there was no possible way through that wall. And yet she had come through.

The silence was thick, damp, hot; it weighed down upon her and filled her with a sudden terror. She had never encountered silence so intense. It unnerved her. And then in the midst of that silence she heard, not a man forcing his way through the bush, but a man swearing softly just behind her.

He swore and grunted like one exerting all his strength. He muttered: "Come up, you brute," softly,

Intolerable Samaritans

but so intense was the silence that she seemed to hear the words at her side. There was a sound of scuffling, a tearing of vines, then a heavy, sullen splash. Liliás's face suddenly became grim and white; she turned in her tracks and went back as silently as she could. At the edge of the clearing which she had left she stopped and looked through the leaves.

It was as she had thought. Ralph Felton had levered the tree trunk she had pointed out into the river. The current was already dragging at it, though one end was anchored in the mud. Felton was busy collecting the packets of money. There was no mistaking the haste of his movements. He was anxious to get away, with the money and food, before she completed the circuit of the island. He meant to leave her marooned there.

She stepped out on him when he had his hands full of packets.

"So that was your bright thought!" she cried. "You intended to slip away while I was lost in the jungle! As you said just now, a pretty idea!"

He stared at her, his eyes shifty and cruel. He said:

"Hallo! Glad you're back! Suddenly occurred to me to try that suggestion of yours. I think it'll work, after all, you know."

"For both of us?" she enquired drily.

"Of course," he said, with a show of enthusiasm. "I thought I'd ferry the money and stuff over on this trunk, and then come back for you."

She came towards him.

The Brute

"I know exactly what you intended to do," she said. "You needn't lie!"

"Then I won't!" he snapped. "You're right. I'm not going to cumber myself with any fool woman. You're darn well going to stay here, and I'm going off on that log!"

"I think not," she said softly.

He dropped all his parcels and grabbed at his pistol. But she had expected that. Before he could reach his weapon her own pistol was covering him.

"No you don't, Ralph!" she said. "I'm a pretty good shot, and as close as this you're an easy mark. Put your hands above your head and turn about."

He spat a refusal, and she loosed a shot that tore by his ears. He sprang round like a cat, his knees shaking, his hands aloft.

"You're the worst specimen of cur I've ever met!" she told him. "No wonder Martin Sondes considers you're best wiped off the earth."

She went up to him to take the pistol from his pocket. He shifted a little so that the removal was difficult, and she had to drop her own pistol-hand to get at his weapon. He had played for that; he snatched at her arm and tried to tear the pistol away. For the moment he had her at a disadvantage, but she was a strong woman, and fought him off. He attacked her with utter brutality, and without the slightest show of manliness. He gripped her by the throat, and it would have gone ill with her—but suddenly she laughed in his face.

Intolerable Samaritans

“We are fighting for nothing!” she cried. “Look at your log!”

Felton looked at the water aghast. The log had been carried out into the river, was already swinging to follow the current. He ran to the bank and plunged into the stream towards the log. He floundered waist high, then suddenly shot down into a mud hole. It was Liliias’s hand that plucked him out, and dragged him scrambling to the bank. As she helped him her hand went down to his hip, and came away with his pistol.

He raged when he saw how completely she had him at her mercy.

“That was the only likely log, the only chance of escape we had!” he gasped. “You and your foolery have marooned us! Understand that? We’re helpless here.”

He would blame her, she saw that. He would always blame somebody else for the results of his own evil acts. His mind had become utterly warped by vice, and she could see that even his hate for Martin Sondes was genuinely inspired—though that inspiration was his own scoundrelism.

He sat sullen through the evening. He did not even stir himself when Liliias made up a great fire. Night came on and Liliias moved to a high part of the bank where she could command him as he sat in the blaze. She could see that his foxy eyes were creeping towards her every now and then. He was making some ugly plan to get rid of her. Liliias laughed softly to herself. She could be as cunning as he, and teach him

The Brute

a lesson into the bargain. As the fire began to flicker low she pretended to sink into sleep. In a short time he rose and moved stealthily towards her. She laughed softly again, waited until he had drawn level with the pile of dead wood she had collected, and said:

“Sorry to dash your hopes, Ralph. I’m fully awake. You might work off your rage by throwing some logs on the fire. A few at a time, please, so as they will burn brightly.”

He stood snarling and mowing at her. Cursing her with a hateful stream of language.

“That’s enough,” she snapped. “Put those logs on the fire.”

“I’ll see you damned first,” he said.

Her pistol spoke.

Again the bullet tore close enough to him to make him realize that she could handle the weapon effectively. He lunged for the woodpile; hesitated; heard her cool voice say: “The next will disable you, Ralph. That seems the only way to keep you helpless.” He began to pile on the logs.

He sat by the blaze all night, sullen and unspeaking, but obeying in a craven way her every command to keep the fire bright. Liliias sat sleepless, watching him. There was an absolute disgust in her regard. It seemed to her that he had reached the lowest depths of human ignominy. He was without a decent fibre in his composition; he was utterly incapable of anything save meanness.

It was, as Bevis had guessed, dawn before Cipriano and the canoes came in sight. At first, as with Jenni-

Intolerable Samaritans

fer in the church, they had a thrill of hope. Ralph thought these might be ordinary voyagers, and he began to warn Liliás to act circumspectly and not to give a hint as to the money.

Liliás said contemptuously: "You can save your breath. It is Cipriano Bravo, and others of his gang of thieves."

He sprang to his feet, shaking, staring round like a trapped animal.

"They mustn't catch us, Gonzala will be with them," he shrilled. "We've got to get away."

"Only we can't," said Liliás. She tossed one of the pistols across to him. "You've got to fight."

He stared, shrinking.

"Too many," he cried, "too many!"

"That doesn't matter," she said. "We have no choice."

He turned as though to run.

"If we left the money," he cried, "they'd take it—be satisfied—leave us alone! I'm for the bush!"

"If you move," she said with a fierce snarl, "I'll shoot you! If you won't fight, you won't run either!"

"Don't be senseless, Liliás!" he whined. "You don't know what these devils will do to us if they catch us!"

"Stay just where you are, and remember you are well in my line of fire!" She lifted her voice to the canoes, now hovering close. "Senhor Cipriano!" she called.

"Senhorita!" came back Cipriano's voice. "It is you, safe! I am overjoyed that I can effect your rescue!"

The Brute

“I am here, senhor,” said Lilias grimly, “well under cover and with a pistol pointed at your chest. I think that several of its ten shots may hit you—if that is necessary. It will not be necessary, if you grant me a favour.”

“Ladies have only to speak, and Cipriano Bravo runs to obey,” he answered.

“It is good!” she cried. “We are here, I and the half-brother of the lady back in the village. The money is also here, intact. For my goodwill in not shooting you dead, I ask that a safe passage be given both of us back to our companions.”

“No!” cried Felton hoarsely. “Don’t make it that. Demand a safe passage to the river bank only.”

“Back to our companions,” Lilias answered grimly. “Will you concede that, Senhor Cipriano?”

“It is so easy that I could ask for something more difficult, beauteous senhorita.”

“It is all I ask. You will give me your word as a *cavaliero*?”

“To carry you as far as your companions in the Indian village—no more?”

“That is all.”

“It is granted at once, senhorita.”

At Lilias’s signal the canoes shot towards the shore and the ruffians landed. Ralph Felton did not even attempt resistance. He surrendered his pistol, he watched the money being loaded, he obeyed Cipriano’s order to join him in his canoe with cringing obedience. Lilias, from the other canoe, watched him with loath-

Intolerable Samaritans

ing, her eyes were fully open to him now. Her demand that he should be carried back to their companions was an act of reparation for her folly. If Jennifer and Bevis and Paul were to suffer for their baseness—Ralph Felton would suffer with them.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAROONED

CIPRIANO BRAVO had ordered Ralph Felton into his canoe with deliberate intention. His triumphant recovery of the money had inflamed his greed and stimulated a bold idea that had been growing within him since he first looked upon Jennifer's beauty. Ruthless, pitiless, insatiably avaricious, recognizing that there was none to oppose his will in this wild land, his ambition, incredible though it would appear to civilized minds, seemed to him but natural. Indeed, the whole thing appeared to him providentially arranged.

The presence of Jennifer's half-brother seemed but another indication that providence was working for Cipriano Bravo's ends.

He had assessed the character of Ralph Felton instantly. He knew him to be a creature so craven and mean-spirited that he would descend to any depths to save his skin. A threat would make this cur a willing ally. Indeed, it was already making him that; even as Felton sat cringing in the canoe he was trying to ingratiate himself with the saint-faced cut-throat.

Cipriano said: "It is strange that you should run away from your half-sister as you did."

The Marooned

“She was so obstinate, senhor,” the man whined. “She would dally over negotiations with the Indians—that was perilous, naturally.”

“But to desert one of one’s own blood?”

“That means little, senhor. She is but my half-sister. We were never truly sympathetic. And I have not seen her for many years—she is almost a stranger.”

“She is, however, very charming, very beautiful.” Cipriano said this deliberately, letting the words sink in Felton’s consciousness with intent.

Felton dropped his sly eyes under the meaning look. If he had any disgust at the intention behind that remark, it was swamped, in the short pause that followed, by a surge of hope. Ralph Felton saw, daz- zlingly, that here might be a way to save his skin—as Cipriano had intended he should see.

He said: “A brother would be less aware of that charm and beauty than a discriminating *cavaliero* like yourself, senhor.”

“I confess that the mere sight of her beauty con- quers me, senhor,” said Cipriano. “She is very de- sirable.”

Ralph Felton gulped, not in horror but in hope.

“That is truly a noble sentiment, senhor,” he said slyly.

“You are with me in that?” said Cipriano, and his eyes firmly invited an alliance.

“I think that such a worthy emotion should be for- warded,” said Felton, taking his chance with both hands.

The Brute

“It is satisfactory,” said Cipriano. “The senhorita is beautiful—she is also rich?”

“Very rich,” said Felton with haste.

“How rich?”

Felton told him—eloquently. He was perhaps overlavish, but he felt that for his own sake it was better so. He did not belittle details. His description of Jennifer’s wealth was the description almost of a millionairess. He told of estates in the country and houses in town. He spoke of stocks and shares, of jewels, motor cars, plate, servants and all the other trappings of unstinted luxury. And his picture was convincing. Before he had half finished he had Cipriano breathless and bright-eyed with greed.

“It is superb,” said the cutthroat. “And all that is her own?”

“Her very own, to control as she wills.”

“But you are her brother?”

“Her half-brother. Not a penny of that wealth is mine to handle. My step-father left all to her. He might have made me rich, but he ignored me and left me penniless.”

“He knew you, undoubtedly, yet even he could not remove the fact that his daughter was the sister of a thief,” said Cipriano with slow satisfaction, and Ralph Felton with a cringing gulp swallowed even that. “It is a very grave drawback to a marriageable girl. But a noble-minded man would overlook it,” finished Cipriano loftily.

“Yes,” said Felton with dry lips. “Your mag-

The Marooned

nanimity is handsome, senhor. But there are advantages.”

“That may be. She may also have other interested relatives.”

“None,” said Felton, and his shifty eyes found the rogue’s. “She is alone—but for me.”

“Ah, that would make you the nearest male and the head of the family.”

Felton dropped his eyes. The unbearable ordeal of having to look a human being squarely in the face was over. He and Cipriano understood each other thoroughly. He had found a way into the good graces of the relentless desperado. He could save himself—if he played his cards well he might do more. He played them.

“That is so. I am the head of the family. Though that does not mean so much in my own country.”

“But we are in Latin-America, where it means everything,” said Cipriano with satisfaction. “Here we are wise in these things. We know that beautiful and rich girls can be foolish in the matter of love. She needs the more practical male guidance. It is a sound law that ordains that in such cases the father, guardian—or husband—should have that responsible control of herself and fortune.” He looked up cunningly. “You know of nothing in her inheritance that would interfere with the wisdom of that law?”

Felton knew nothing at all about Jennifer’s inheritance, but he was not going to lose his chance for that. He said calmly: “Nothing that I cannot overcome.”

The Brute

Cipriano relaxed to an easier position.

“That is good,” he murmured, “fortune smiles on true love.” He sighed and his beautiful, greedy eyes were veiled in contemplation.

Felton ventured presently:

“It should be well. . . . As the law of this land goes, my consent is necessary for my sister’s marriage.”

“A very good law, too,” the other assured him. “Far better than this untrammelled choice by juvenile love of you Inglez.”

“That is true. But since my consent is so necessary——”

“I know you would not withhold it where a deserving and noble-minded husband was concerned,” smiled Cipriano with a cruel showing of teeth.

“No, no. Most certainly not!” Felton stammered under the hint of threat. “But”—he became desperate—“where do I come in?”

“I would see to it,” said Cipriano with his noiseless laugh, “that you enjoyed a longer lease of life than your present circumstances seem to warrant.”

Felton started back, his nerveless mouth agape with terror.

“I held my finger trigger back there at the island,” Cipriano went on. “You, being of a gentle heart, will understand why. I said to myself, ‘After all, he is *her* brother. I cannot shoot him—*yet.*’ ”

“*Yet!*” gulped Felton.

“As to the future,” the cutthroat went on dreamily, “it must be, as you recognize, in the hands of love.

The Marooned

The fingers of an embittered suitor fly readily to the pistol butt, is it not so?"

"I see," said Felton limply, and he sat huddled in the canoe. It was only as they neared the village that he said, "After all, I will be your brother-in-law."

"Step-brother-in-law," Cipriano corrected placidly. "And a thief at that. But I will admit that even a slight relationship to Cipriano Bravo is not without advantages. And I am not skilled in British legal custom, either. Usefulness may preserve you."

Again their glances met, and Felton knew that they understood each other, and that on his part this understanding must recognize that Cipriano Bravo would not hesitate to be ruthless if he, Ralph Felton, did not help him in every way.

CHAPTER XXV

SHE IS BEAUTIFUL—ALSO RICH!

JENNIFER'S hut was near the *praya*, and as it was a mere shack with a roof and three leaf-walls she was able to see and hear all that happened when the canoe party reached the landing stage.

She saw the dagos swarming, and heard their shouts, and learnt from them that the money had been recaptured. But that was obvious enough, for Liliias was standing amid the crowd, and Ralph Felton was shambling furtively as close to Cipriano's heels as possible. The sight of him so familiar with the cut-throat made her sick with apprehension. She felt in her heart that that mean-spirited wretch had already formed some sort of alliance with Cipriano, and she guessed that that could only mean ugly things for them—for herself.

Felton was unwholesome to look at. Even that crowd of dago rascals seemed manly beside him. Jennifer wondered how she had ever come to trust him before a real man like Martin Sondes. She realized her criminal foolishness as she looked down upon him, and though she accepted her punishment stoically, as something fully deserved, her heart cried out for another chance with Martin. If she could only show him how she repented, how she in her soul

She Is Beautiful—Also Rich!

really trusted him, loved him—if she could only do that, for just one hour, she would accept willingly all the dangers and horrors she saw were coming.

Her thoughts were disturbed by a sudden change in the tone of the crowd. Gonzala was pushing towards Cipriano. His big, rough-hewn figure was shouldering through the dagos. But he was not looking at Cipriano: he was looking at Felton, and his face had the look of a hunting animal that had found its prey.

Felton did not see Gonzala until the man halted by him, and said in a tone vibrant with fury: “So, Smidt, you are here!”

At the sound of the voice Felton spun round, saw Gonzala, shrank away from him with a gasp of terror, his figure revealing wilting fear in every line. He stood there for half a minute with a loose and gaping mouth. Then he tried to bolt. But Gonzala’s great fist swung upward and Felton was smashed to the beach with a single terrific blow.

Jennifer shrank back, appalled. The dagos stood back, hoping that Felton would rise and that they would see more fighting. Only Cipriano looked at his ally, and asked, but not with any great concern:

“What is this, Gonzala?”

Gonzala glared down at the squirming Felton.

“You are now my friend eternally, Cipriano!” he said, with a low laugh. “You have brought me a man I have been longing for years to kill!”

“So—and why?”

Slowly weighing each word, Gonzala told an ugly

The Brute

tale. Gonzala's niece was in it, and money, of course, and hospitality and honour betrayed. Gonzala glossed nothing. He made plain all Felton's cold, slimy capacity for worming his way into the good graces of trusting people. He did not spare a detail of the cold-blooded betrayal and robbery. Every fact came out of Gonzala's lips with hammerlike force, and under the recital even the dagos snarled and looked murderous. Felton, not venturing to rise from the ground, squirmed, expecting death every moment. Only Cipriano remained calm, watching Gonzala with his bright eyes.

And Jennifer heard everything. It came to her distinctly, horribly. She listened to the whole story with a mind revolting at its vileness. She felt that no man could be so debased as this—and yet she believed Gonzala. Gonzala spoke like a man telling, and Felton cringed like a man hearing, the irrefutable truth.

It *was* the truth. Jennifer was sure of it. Martin Sondes could have told her that it was, after all, but one item in a long career of similar ugly deeds, but she did not need to have Martin's assurance. She knew. She knew she had sent away from her the only man who counted in the world for the sake of a wretch so debased that she felt she was smirched by the mere thought that he was related to her. It was the final, the crowning revelation of her error.

And all the time the level voice of Gonzala went on, reciting grimly the hideous details of Ralph Fel-

She Is Beautiful—Also Rich!

ton's crime, and the dagos growled and Cipriano watched alertly. In the end:

"So, you see," concluded Gonzala, "that is why I shall kill him."

The dagos let out throaty growls of agreement. There could be no other decision. Gonzala nodded, his eyes fixed on the quaking Felton. He pulled his belt round, and his hand slid onto the haft of his knife.

Cipriano's hand went out and touched his arm. Cipriano's voice said, with a suave, cold note:

"Not so fast, my good Gonzala."

Gonzala lifted his head and glared in astonishment.

"But you surely recognize that I must kill this son of a pig," he cried.

"No," said Cipriano, smiling and even. "You will not kill him."

Gonzala seemed to crouch a little. His hand gripped his knife, half drew it. Then he stiffened. From the hip Cipriano's pistol was menacing his heart.

"You will not kill him," Cipriano assured him. "I have given him my honourable word that he is not to be hurt."

"Your honourable word to a scoundrel? You are mad!"

"Nevertheless, I keep my word. You do not touch this man."

"My vow!" Gonzala cried. "I have my vow to keep."

The Brute

“And I my interests to protect,” said Cipriano. “This man is necessary to them.”

“Your interests—this spawn of a snake has nothing to do with any man’s interests.”

“That is enough,” said Cipriano. “I tell you I have use for him.”

“No!” snapped Gonzala. “Even we cannot use one so foul. He is outside our use. I kill him.”

They stared at each other for a moment, one with a passion of rage in his twisting face, the other with his cold and deadly calm. Suddenly Gonzala leaped aside and his knife was out and thrusting. He thrust to kill, but even before he leapt Cipriano’s pistol had spoken, and Gonzala, with his stroke half begun, crumpled, sagged, and fell like an empty sack. From the way he lay it was easy to see he was dead.

Cipriano looked down at him, smiling. Then his cold, savage glance swept the faces of the men about him. In that smile was an invitation and a threat. The men shrank and backed before it.

Cipriano smiled again; softly he told the fat Pascobas to attend to the unloading of the money, kicked Felton to his feet, and with him trailing at his heels like a dog, walked toward the *cacique’s* house, which he used for himself.

At Jennifer’s shack he paused before the girl, standing white and stiff with horror. He swept off his hat with a gallant bow.

“You saw me save your brother’s life,” he said significantly. “Count that to my favour, senhorita.”

He went on his way ignoring, perhaps not even

She Is Beautiful—Also Rich!

troubling to note, how Jennifer shrank from him. Ralph Felton may have noted it, but he was simply a cringing figure shambling at the heels of his master. Jennifer ignored him; with a little shudder she crouched back into the furthest corner of the shack.

So she remained for a little while, desperately fighting with a terror that threatened to swamp her and send her into screaming hysteria. She fought it back and back, inch by inch. She knew that this was not the time for hysteria or even terror. She must control herself, for in a short while she would need all her nerve. Presently her will got the better of her quivering fears. She stood up, as though to test her strength, then, with an apparent calm, came out of her shack and walked through the village. There were dagos about, armed; but with the death of the strict Gonzala, discipline had been relaxed. From the deep shade by the huts they watched her walking with indolent eyes. They were ready and willing to shoot should anything untoward happen, but unless it happened they were not anxious to undergo exertion in this heat.

Jennifer had counted on this. Boldness—audacity—they might accomplish something that way; indeed, it was the only way left.

The one guard left at the men's hut was in a casual mood. With Gonzala gone he saw no reason why the pretty Inglez woman should not go into the hut of the Inglez prisoners. Time enough to bestir himself if they made trouble.

Glen and Probyn sprang up as she entered—theirs

The Brute

was a hut with four walls. She checked anything they had to say with a gesture.

“Cipriano has returned,” she said softly and quickly. “He has brought Ralph back with him and—and there is some horrible scheme afoot. I am sure of it. We must get away at once.”

“You mean we must make a dash for it now?” said Bevis.

“Yes,” said Jennifer. “Cipriano is with the *cacique*. This is our only chance.”

“Risky,” said Glen. “They’ll pot at us as we run to the jungle—and the jungle itself is no playground.”

“There are worse risks,” said Jennifer, with a catch in her voice, “than being shot or dying in the jungle. If either of those happened it would be an easy way out.”

Glen stared at her; it was Probyn, whose eyes had been watching her closely, who showed understanding.

“You fear Cipriano?” he asked quietly.

“Yes,” She shuddered.

Bevis understood fully. He had already had an inkling of the scoundrel’s plan to marry Jennifer for the sake of her money, and he knew that no civilized consideration would stop a man of that type. He laid his hand on the girl’s shoulder, and said:

“All right, Jennifer, we’ll make a cut for it. Best, I think, to get out at the back of this hut, by pulling these palm leaves aside. But you understand the risks.”

“What do they matter?” she demanded. “It is

She Is Beautiful—Also Rich!

merely a choice between being shot by them or by a bullet from my own revolver.”

Bevis Probyn looked at her, and then said softly to Paul:

“Pull aside those palm leaves gently, Paul. Near the floor. We should be able to slide through unobserved.”

Both Glen and Probyn pulled away the flimsy palm leaves. They made a hole large enough to pass through, and slipped out softly into the brazen sunlight of the tropic day.

Before them, across only a narrow strip of open, was the jungle. Let them reach that without being hit and they might dodge pursuit and so escape. It was no distance; it seemed easy. Paul put his hand into Jennifer's to help her run.

A low laugh sounded from their right.

They looked in that direction. In the shadow of the hut stood Cipriano and a line of men. Cipriano was smiling; the men were smiling. They had reason. Every one of them had a pistol or a rifle pointed at the prisoners.

Cipriano walked forward.

“I am charmed,” he said. “This must be some beautiful Inglez custom by which the bride hastens to the groom. I salute you, gracious bride.”

They stood before him silent, hypnotized by the shock of their failure, Jennifer trembling between the two men.

“This ceremony over,” Cipriano mocked, “we will now separate—you, senhors, to a more stable hut;

The Brute

you, my affianced, to your shack, where the devoted care of my men will guard you. There you will rest, for in an hour we will take the road to the nearest town where there is a notary."

Probyn said curtly:

"Such joking is in bad taste, senhor, and unworthy of a *cavaliero*."

"Joking," cried Cipriano, with a flash of anger. "Is it a joke that I give this lady the honour of my name in marriage?"

"Such a marriage is unthinkable," said Bevis.

"No," Cipriano retorted. "She is beautiful. I love her. And I am a honourable man—I marry her."

Jennifer said with shaking lips:

"I refuse to marry you!"

Cipriano shrugged his shoulders.

"It is already arranged," he told her.

"Arranged?" cried Jennifer, aghast.

"That is so. In this land, you understand, as in other Latin countries, marriage is not an affair of youthful whims. It is a grave matter, to be arranged by the properly accredited relatives of the parties. I, unfortunately, am without relatives. You——"

"Nobody can arrange such a thing for me," Jennifer protested.

"Oh, but you are wrong," the dago assured her. "The arrangement has been made by one fully entitled to do so in the eyes of the law; by the male head of your family, your half-brother."

"Ralph has—has arranged this?" Jennifer exclaimed, aghast.

She Is Beautiful—Also Rich!

“Ask him,” Cipriano invited. “He is over there.”

Jennifer cast one look towards the group of men. She saw Felton, pale-eyed and furtive, standing amongst them. She turned and with stumbling steps went back to her shack.

As she went her hand closed on the revolver hidden in her tropic shirt. To touch it was her only sensation of hope. It seemed inevitable that she would have to use that weapon.

In the dull-eyed minutes after the siesta, when the party gathered for the march, Jennifer, Paul, Bevis and Lilius Seyler were flung together again. A couple of yawning, cigarette-smoking peons stood by them with rifles ready, while Cipriano and Pascobas with Ralph Felton in close attendance saw to the packing. For just that few minutes they could speak to each other. Lilius Seyler stood a little aside, but Paul and Bevis drew close to Jennifer trying to infuse a little courage, a little hope into her tragic-eyed, white-faced numbness.

Paul, restraining his fury, said:

“Keep up your courage, Jennifer. He’s only trying to frighten us. All his talk is sheer South American bluff.”

Jennifer did not answer. She had looked into Cipriano Bravo’s eyes. She had read the truth there. She had seen that she had but two courses now left her. She must marry Cipriano, as he firmly intended she should, or she must take the one way out with the revolver she kept concealed on her person.

Probyn said nothing, either. He knew Latin-

The Brute

America. He knew what a brute like Cipriano would dare in lands where the law did not run.

The silence of both spurred Paul on.

"He can't possibly do it," he cried. "It's monstrous!"

Jennifer made a little gesture of weariness.

"No good talking about it," she said. "No good pretending. We know he will stick at nothing."

"But, by Heaven, we'll see he won't do it. Marry you! Never! We'll see to that."

"I'll see to it, Paul," she answered, and they were all chilled by her tone. They remembered the revolver.

Paul said hoarsely:

"We'll do something before you come to that, Jennifer. Trust us."

"What can you do?" she asked, tonelessly.

What could they do? Bevis Probyn had thought and thought over that ground ever since he had heard Cipriano utter his abominable resolve. What could they do? They were alone, weaponless, quite powerless. They were utterly at the mercy of this gang of ruffians and of its ruffianly leader. They could obey or die, that was all.

Nevertheless he said evenly:

"Do nothing precipitate, Jennifer. Something may turn up. One never quite knows when a chance may come in a land like this."

"What can you do?" she said again.

"We may get a shot at those brutes, Cipriano and Pascobas," Paul suggested. "Let us get at them,

She Is Beautiful—Also Rich!

even with our naked hands, and we'll tear the vile life out of them."

"No," she told him. "I've brought enough trouble on you by my stupidity. You mustn't attempt anything desperate or foolish. It will only mean your death."

"I guess that's coming, anyhow," said Paul.

"No," said Bevis unexpectedly. "I think he means to keep us alive. I think he has a use for us."

"What use can he have for you, Bevis?" Jennifer asked.

"Oh, it's just an idea," he said lamely.

"Tell me," she insisted, "I want to feel that you will remain unharmed through the march."

"Well, he'll want witnesses—to this marriage he talks of. We may be unwilling witnesses but we *will* be able to certify that it—it was a marriage in due form and order. He counts on our testimony supporting him—our being English, you see, and—and not rogues like Felton, either."

"I suppose," Jennifer observed quietly, "the idea behind this marriage is that he can get control of my money, my estate?"

"Yes," said Bevis. "Latin-American law gives the husband such control, I fancy. I don't know whether that will hold in British law. Cipriano, it seems to me, doesn't know, either. But he means to safeguard himself in advance by having reliable witnesses. That is the only reason I can see for his not killing us out of hand as he meant to this morning. He's decided we might, after all, have some value alive."

The Brute

So that is what I mean, my dear, by telling you not to do anything precipitately. We'll remain alive, and while we're alive there's always hope."

"If it only takes the form of hammering some manliness into that cur Felton," Paul cut in. "If we can get at him we can perhaps prevent him from giving his consent, which Cipriano seems to imagine counts so much."

"You will not knock manliness into Ralph Felton," said Liliás's slow voice beside them.

They turned to her. She looked at them with something of her old, feline, mocking smile, but now they saw it was rather a defence than the cloak of a bold and reckless nature. Liliás had had her fill of adventure, and it had shaken her.

She saw their hard glances. She went on with her attempt at bravado:

"Oh, I know I am an enemy now—but even enemies can tell the truth. And the truth about Ralph Felton is that you can hope for no decency from him. You'd better hear what that superb half-brother of yours is capable of."

"No," said Jennifer. "I've heard. I heard Gonzala tell what he had done."

She shuddered as she recalled that ghastly story and its ghastly ending.

"That was almost manly—for Felton," said Liliás with scorn. Ignoring Jennifer's gesture of protest, she told how Ralph Felton had treated her on the island; of all the mean trickery he had attempted in

She Is Beautiful—Also Rich!

order to desert her, a woman—a woman who had risked all for him.

As she ended, she threw a scornful glance at the others. Her chief scorn was for Jennifer.

“And that is the man,” she said fiercely, “you chose instead of Martin Sondes. That is the man you believed before him. That is the man for whom you sent him away.”

“Yes,” said Jennifer dully. “Yes, I know.”

“You know,” said Liliias bitterly. “Why didn’t you always know? I knew Martin Sondes. I may be all that you think I am—detestable, scheming, unprincipled, and the rest—but I never made the mistake of thinking Martin Sondes anything but what he is—straight, fine, strong, big-hearted—a Man.”

They were all silent. Jennifer, limp and pale, stared between the huts at the thick and sombre jungle. She had no answer to make. It was all true. She knew that Martin Sondes was exactly as Liliias had described him. She knew the crime she had committed against her companions and against herself when she sent him away.

“Look here, Liliias,” began Paul, “you mustn’t talk like this—”

“Mustn’t?” cried Liliias. “You—you undiscerning male, I’ve got to talk like this because—because I loved Martin Sondes, yes, really loved him. I loved him and he wouldn’t look at me because he loved Jennifer—who wouldn’t look at him. For his sake she has to know.”

Jennifer looked at her quietly.

The Brute

“I know, Liliás,” she said. “I know even as you know.”

The two men dropped their eyes. They could not look at Jennifer. They knew and Liliás knew that Jennifer loved Martin Sondes and had not realized it until too late.

So Cipriano Bravo found them when he came to marshal them for the march. He separated them, scattering them along the train of men and animals already beginning to file under the night of leaves along the jungle trail. They went off with hopeless hearts, each thinking the same thought. . . . If they hadn't sent Martin Sondes away. . . . If only he were here, what a difference it would make.

CHAPTER XXVI

CIPRIANO CONDESCENDS

THE jungle swallowed them at once in thick, hot, muffling darkness. The brazen sun of the tropics was blotted out as though it had never been. Human life even seemed to vanish save for the few jogging shoulders of men before them, the few jogging faces behind. In the narrow, winding jungle-trail between the huge and upstanding trees and the thick curtaining of the vines were the contents of their world. They shuffled monotonously and steadily on, a company of ghosts in a world of the tomb.

They pushed on doggedly all the rest of the day; and again after their night's camp. It was in the early hours of the next day's march that something happened.

The column quite suddenly halted. It was an abrupt halt, like a jolt. At first there was dead silence, then arose a chattering as though a waggon-load of monkeys had been let loose. It took Paul a full half-minute to realize that the monkeys were actually dagos giving tongue.

Then there was a sudden yell—no, a scream. A man's scream, with a cold thread of creepy fear running through it. It was ghastly, hearing that sound in the thick, hot tomb of the dead forest.

The Brute

Firing began.

Paul had a mad impulse to make a dash for the bush. The thing that stopped him was not realization of the folly of a greenhorn like him hoping to live in the forest, but the sight of the men behind and before him. Their eyes were gleaming, and so were their teeth. They had the look of animals frightened and dangerous. And their weapons were ominous.

He stood still. It was well that he did. Cipriano, a pistol in each hand, came slipping up from the rear. As he passed Glen, he snarled at him. He also shouted a command to the men to shoot the Inglez immediately he showed the slightest sign of giving trouble.

The firing ahead died down. The chattering arose again. Paul thought he could distinguish the voice of the fat Pascobas, who was among the leaders of the column. Presently, he certainly did pick up the voice of Cipriano. Then the column began to move once more.

It moved on for an hour. Nothing seemed to happen. Only the tall and ominous trees hemmed it close, like the walls of a living tomb. Then an abrupt and dismaying outburst, first of shouting and then of shooting, from the rear.

The column halted again, and Cipriano, who had remained ahead, came sliding back. His face had a devil's frown over its saintly features. He looked at once both cruel and fearful. He darted glances at the trees on either side and held his pistols ready.

The way he looked into the jungle had somehow a

Cipriano Condescends

deadly and sinister significance. Every man about Paul began to crouch and stare into the bush, and to hold his weapon ready for something he might see, something that might come out of that jungle.

It was a disturbing, a nerve-destroying atmosphere. The jungle, always hateful, abruptly became alive with menace. Somewhere behind that inscrutable mesh of trunks and vines and leaves was something full of threat for them. It crawled in deep shadows, and from those shadows it could kill. It was silent—deadly silent; it was unseen. but it could kill. One felt it, mocking, awful.

The thrill of knowledge swept along the line. The men went on, but they went on huddled together, and everyone stared over his shoulder into the dark green gloom, his eyes and teeth glinting in fright. If a monkey coughed or a branch cracked, or a hidden bird flew off with a flutter, one could feel the "A-ah!" that went shuddering down the line.

They all felt the horror, even Jennifer. She did not know what it was. But she felt that the atmosphere was menacing, fearful. Nothing had been said to her, she had caught no hint. Yet the way the peons moved, crouching and wary, told her.

The column went on, and it was with a sigh of relief that they pushed out of the canyon of the trees into the sun-dappled open space where they were to halt for the midday meal.

But even as they emerged, something about their party held Jennifer's attention. She did not realize what it was until it came to her that they were fewer.

The Brute

They had come out of the jungle with less men than they entered it. How many less she did not know—but she felt certain that they had left some behind in the jungle. Why had they left them behind?

She had no sooner asked herself that when Pascobas let out a terrified shout. He had waited for Cipriano to come out of the jungle, and had been walking with him when he shouted.

He shouted again and spun about, his fat arms out, his fat body absurdly sprawled. And as he spun Jennifer saw something sticking in his fat neck, a little sliver of something like an arrow, but too small to be an arrow. And even as she saw it Pascobas began to topple to the ground.

As he toppled Cipriano suddenly ducked and jumped for shelter behind that falling body. And as he ducked Jennifer saw something glint above his head—another of the small arrows. It frightened Cipriano absurdly, for immediately and without taking aim he fired with both his pistols into the bush, trying to rake the undergrowth as though with machine-gun fire. And as he fired he ran, ran away from Pascobas.

Pascobas did not run; he could not. He was lying on the ground in a queer, jumbled heap, and he was deadly still. Jennifer knew at once what was the matter with him. He was dead, although there had been no sound from the jungle, no shot fired. He had been struck dead by the silent death lurking in the deadly, silent bush.

At once Jennifer knew how it was that the party

Cipriano Condescends

seemed fewer in numbers. And glancing round at the peons she knew that they were huddled together in a fear that was on the verge of panic. They were staring at the bush with eyes that shone in terror.

Those little glinting things that looked like absurd toy-arrows—they killed. They came silently out of the silence of the jungle and slew swiftly, certainly, and terribly, with no more than a scratch.

Bevis at her side said:

“Curare!”

“You mean those little arrows?” Jennifer asked.

“It’s the stuff on those little arrows,” he said. “And they aren’t exactly arrows, they’re darts. Blowpipe darts.”

“What is curare?”

“Poison. The Indians hereabouts use it mainly on their darts. They’re as skilful as the Dyaks of Borneo with their blowpipes. Can hit anything at thirty and almost anything at sixty paces. That’s why this is rather queer.”

He was looking at her strangely.

“Queer, what do you mean by that, Bevis?”

She felt he was trying to tell her something, or rather to suggest something that might give her hope.

“Queer, because the man who is using that blow-pipe doesn’t seem to be highly skilled. He doesn’t hit his mark, though I should have said that mark was never more than twenty or thirty paces away. He was trying to get Pascobas—back there in the jungle, the first time, you know—the second time he seems to have shot into the brown just to keep our

The Brute

nerves on the jangle. But the first time he was undoubtedly after Pascobas.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite. I’ve been listening to the talk of the peons. They’re quite certain. His first shot got the man just ahead of Pascobas, the second went over his head, and the third got the fellow at his shoulder. Then the man with the blowpipe went to cover because they began to loose off.”

“But he got Pascobas just now!”

“Not with the first shot. I was watching, and it missed. I think he was trying to get Cipriano, anyhow. He nearly did with his third dart, which shows his marksmanship is improving. But if he’d been an Indian he wouldn’t have missed.”

“You’re trying to tell me he isn’t an Indian?”

“I’m trying to prove it to myself, Jennifer,” said Bevis in a hesitating voice.

“And if it isn’t an Indian?”

“It might be a dago,” he said.

“What dago?” she cried breathlessly. “What reason for a dago— What reason for this attack at all? It must be—Bevis, don’t you see?”

“We don’t know,” he said quickly. “No good guessing.”

“Don’t we know?” she cried with a little laugh. “Don’t we? Who else could it be? What other man could it be?”

“We don’t know,” he said. “Don’t count on it.”

“I know,” she said evenly. “There is only one man who could do a thing like this—Martin Sondes.”

Cipriano Condescends

She was absolutely sure that the man who was shooting so secretly, so silently, from the bush was Martin Sondes. The logic of the thing made that plain, the knowledge of her heart made it a certainty. Martin Sondes was working for their rescue. He had learnt of their plight and, sinking all his own feelings, forgetting her treatment of him, that great-hearted man had come to their aid.

She insisted that this was the truth of things to Bevis, who did not need much convincing.

“Yes, I think it’s Martin,” he admitted. “And we can rely upon him to do everything he possibly can. At the same time I should say that from his methods he can have very few, if any, men with him.”

“It looks to me,” said Jennifer with a soft laugh, “as though that made very little difference to Martin Sondes. He knows how to overcome such a handicap. And he is succeeding. The plan he is employing is already having its effect. Look at these brutes, they are already demoralized.”

The mysteriousness, the deadliness of the attack from the silent jungle was playing on the nerves of the peons. They were in a crawling panic. Their imaginations and their tongues had already fanned their fears to a pitch of terror that was very close to the breaking point. They feared to enter the jungle as they might fear to enter the gates of hell. They did not know who was striking at them or from what direction. They did not know who would be the next man struck down by the deadly poisoned darts.

Only their greater fear of Cipriano Bravo, and the

The Brute

whip of Ralph Felton—who had taken his place naturally as second ruffian in command, now that Pascobas was dead—forced them to dare the forest path again. They resumed their journey sullenly, marching packed together, their very skins twitching in fear of the silent and inscrutable death lurking behind the leaf screen.

Fear, also, filled the hearts of Cipriano and Felton, but fear had stimulated their wits. Particularly had fear stimulated Ralph Felton's wits. He was a past master at protecting his own mean skin, and he did that now with characteristic zeal. He walked in the midst of their prisoners, as did Cipriano. Felton moved along close up to the shoulder of Lilius Seyler, and Cipriano Bravo with his long, thin body almost touching Jennifer. Bevis and Probyn, under the threat of pistols, walked close, too. They covered themselves, those two scoundrels, with the bodies of their victims.

Anybody shooting at them ran the risk of hitting the women or the Englishmen—but particularly the women. Felton and Cipriano realized that the wielder of the deadly blowpipe was not an Indian; not an expert. They had also guessed it must be Martin Sondes. They knew that Martin Sondes was the type of man who would not even attempt a risky shot for fear of endangering the life of a woman.

They were right. Cipriano and Felton went immune. Not one of the deadly little darts came their way. But if they had counted on their action putting an end to Sondes's attack, they were wrong. He knew

Cipriano Condescends

that in order to rescue Jennifer and her party he must act quite ruthlessly. He acted quite ruthlessly against the peons. Three times the party halted in that march, and the shouting and the shooting of the morning were repeated. Three times had the noiseless darts winged out of the silent jungle, and three times they had found their mark.

When they made camp that night there were three peons less in their company, and all save a hardened few were utterly demoralized.

They chose a great forest clearing for their camp, building their fires in a position well out of the limited radius of the blowpipe. Guards watched the fringe of the trees with unceasing vigilance, the others crouched sullenly, glowering in turn at the woods and at Cipriano Bravo with a bitterness of fear. One man had accomplished all that. One man had reduced the party to a condition of cringing nerves. Only to look at the scowling, furtive, fear-filled faces told one what manner of power Martin Sondes possessed.

During the whole of the evening only one man of the party of rogues had a mind free from the obsession of the danger. Ralph Felton alone moved freely among the shaken men, slipping from group to group in his snakelike and furtive way, talking here and there. Cipriano Bravo, deep in his thoughts, did not notice him. Felton was too expert in sly plotting to give himself away.

Only when a clamour woke them all in the early

The Brute

light of next morning did they realize what he had accomplished.

The clamour came from seven peons, the most hardened ruffians of the gang, and Cipriano Bravo. It was the clamour of rage and dismay, and there was reason for it. They were all that was left of the party. Felton had vanished, the rest of the peons had vanished. It took very little examination to find that the packets of money had vanished, also. Ralph Felton had been true to himself. He had left even his latest partner in the lurch in order to save and enrich himself.

There was no doubt that his cunning had triumphed. He had played, with disgusting skill, on the shaken nerves of the majority of the peons. He had pointed out to them that the wielder of the deadly and silent death amid the trees was entirely concerned in saving the prisoners. Therefore, as long as they moved with those prisoners in their midst, they were in danger of being shot down from the bush. Only by leaving their dangerous proximity could they hope to be immune, for still the enemy in the bush would remain with the prisoners. They could then go on their way unthreatened. And since they could march without threat they had better carry the plunder with them, so that they could end their journey with purses well filled.

An irresistible line of reasoning; escape and loot. The peons had not even hesitated. They had stolen off in the dead of the night, the guards, who should have been on watch, going with them.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE UNSEEN STALKER

THE rage of Cipriano Bravo at discovering his plight was ungovernable. Not merely had he been left to face an implacable enemy with only seven men, but all his hopes of wealth had been snatched away. Bad enough that Felton had bolted with the £7,000. Worse that by bolting he had put an end to Cipriano's plan of obtaining greater riches by marrying Jennifer. The law of Latin-America was firm on that point. No marriage was legal without the consent of the head of the woman's family. Marriage with Jennifer was useless unless it was legal. And the head of the family had bolted.

Cipriano danced about the camp in a paroxysm of rage that was almost insane. He looked like a madman on the point of murder. His peons, no less than the party, watched him with apprehension. Any moment he might break loose and slay in a wild fury of rage. With both fists above his head he poured a string of curses in the direction which he thought Felton and the runaways must have taken. He turned and shook his fists at that place where he thought Martin Sondes must be lurking. He ramped and swore and called down all horrors and abominations upon Martin's head. . . . He shouted bitter, jeering challenges to Martin to come into the open

The Brute

and meet him in single combat. His evil mind, searching for taunts to sting his enemy into answering rage, found in the presence of the women an effective means. He shouted aloud what he intended to do to the women—unlovely things. . . . Then in the middle of such shouting he stopped and laughed.

He stopped, laughed, and his eyes swung upon Jennifer with a cruel and hateful leer.

He moved a step towards Jennifer. Laughed again.

To his men he said quickly: "Four of you watch the jungle—as you value your lives. Three of you watch the prisoners here. And if they stir as much as a finger, shoot."

Again he laughed and moved towards Jennifer.

"So—your protector as well as your thief brother think they can beat Cipriano Bravo, do they?" he said in a soft, terrible voice. "We shall see. What Cipriano Bravo looks upon and desires—he takes. He takes now—we shall see what man will stop him."

Jennifer backed away as he came on. Her fingers went to her breast where the revolver lay ready.

"Keep away," she said. "I warn you keep away."

He moved closer.

Paul cried: "By heavens, if you touch that lady, you dog, I'll tear you to pieces with my own hands."

"You will be dead before you move," laughed Cipriano. "Be wise and do not interfere when Cipriano Bravo is intent on love."

Jennifer cried out: "Don't move, Paul. Don't do a thing. I implore that. I can look after myself."

The Unseen Stalker

As Cipriano moved closer her hand flashed to the bosom of her shirt—and Cipriano was on her.

He knew what that movement of her hand meant. With a catlike leap he had seized her, was holding her tightly. For a moment he held her, his face smiling cruelly as she struggled ineffectually. Then, deliberately, he kissed her on the lips. She strove to strike him, strove to get at her weapon. He had perhaps played for that weakening double movement. As her hands fluttered, his strong right hand slipped into her shirt, plucked at shirt and revolver and dragged the weapon away, tearing the garment half off her white shoulders.

“So that is the toy you counted on!” he sneered, holding up the tiny weapon of mother-of-pearl. “A pretty thing, worthy of one so pretty. But of no avail against Cipriano Bravo.”

He dropped the revolver contemptuously. With a quick movement he had her straining in his arms.

She fought, her hands striking at his face. She strove to tear herself away. He smiled, held her in an iron grip. Paul cursed hotly, moved. “*Senhor!*” came a warning voice behind him, and he heard a pistol cock.

Desperate, catlike Jennifer was clawing at Cipriano’s eyes. Her fingers found his eyes. He jerked back with an oath, loosened her for an instant. Her hand swinging up smashed against his mouth. He staggered and she was free.

Torn and dishevelled she turned and sprang towards the jungle, running like a deer. Cipriano

The Brute

with a laugh was after her, running after her to the very fringe of the trees. She dodged to evade him, and evaded him. She dodged again. He had her by the wrist. She tried to wrench herself free; laughing he twisted the slender arm, and crying out with pain she fell to her knees. He stood over her gloating as she crouched. Then his hands flashed to her white shoulders and he turned her face to his.

But already there had come a crashing through the undergrowth. Someone came hurtling out, someone seized Cipriano Bravo by the scruff of his neck and the slack of his trousers, lifted him and hurled him through the air. It was only as he landed on his neck that he saw that Martin Sondes had arrived on the scene.

He came down awkwardly on shoulder and thigh, but he twisted like a cat, rose to his knee, and they saw that, though he had struck the ground empty handed, he was up with his pistol ready. At once he began to fire. . . . Cipriano Bravo was not a man to waste time in a matter of life and death.

But Martin Sondes was not unfamiliar with his kind. He had foreseen that very action. He had side-stepped at a jump and Cipriano's bullets simply whipped through the air. Before the saint-faced dago could fire a third time, Sondes, diving at him, had knocked him clean off his knees with a round-arm swipe. Cipriano went, all arms and heels, one way, and his pistol another, out of sight among the undergrowth.

Sondes dived again, pinned the wriggling body to

The Unseen Stalker

the earth with a powerfully applied shoulder. The ruffian, with a supple twist, spilled Martin from him, and sprang to his feet.

That Cipriano should be able to throw off Martin like that was the first hint to Jennifer that something was wrong. Sondes was reeling as he straightened. His great limbs seemed to sag and tremble. Jennifer shot a look at his face. It was yellow-pale, and there was a looseness about the mouth and a strained look about the eyes; a tense and heavy look.

She knew at once what was the matter with the man who was fighting Cipriano for his life, for her life, for all their lives; he was in the grip of an attack of fever. It was only his immense will-power that kept him on his feet at all, that kept him fighting; and even at that, his first rush, his first clash with Cipriano, had meant such a huge output of force that he was already half-drained of his strength.

Cipriano realized it, too. Cipriano, who had the lightness and power of a great jungle cat, realized that he might easily master this redoubtable man. His gun was gone but he had his knife. He backed, snatching at his belt.

He was not quick enough. Sondes was a sick man, but until his sickness laid him helpless he was still a dangerous one. He jumped again, his arm slashed at Cipriano, and the dago, who had imagined that he was just outside his range, took the full force of the drive on his neck.

He went over amazingly, legs wildly up, arms wildly out. He went through the air in a mad, jerk-

The Brute

ing heap. He looked like some big, loose-jointed doll which had been knocked through the air by a stout stick.

He hit the ground, and, dazed by the appalling power of the punch, rolled over and over in his effort to get up. As he rolled Sondes lurched rather than jumped upon him. He grabbed to get a two-handed hold of the brown throat, but the fever was conquering. He missed, got shoulder and shirt instead, and the shirt tore across as Cipriano wriggled round.

The dago hammered Martin's face with his fist, heaved, and got the big body over. Martin tried to lock the man's arms and twist from beneath. But the fever weakened him. His own arms were growing as heavy as lead and as nerveless as slack cotton. His grip missed again, and Cipriano threw the hold off.

He tried to heave his body up; it no more than stirred, and Cipriano, riding him like a horseman, gripped with his knees and remained unspilled. Sondes thumped at the man's waistline, thumps that, if delivered with normal strength, would have sent his man off gasping and writhing. But now, so sapped was his strength, the thumps were only pushes, and Cipriano retaliated by hammering two-handed down on the captain's face.

The smash of one punch roused Sondes for an instant from the growing inertia of fever. His arm pumped up, caught the brute's throat, and toppled him back. Martin rolled clear, tried to rise—could

The Unseen Stalker

not rise. All strength had gone out of his joints. He got to his knees; fell again. Cipriano was on him.

Cipriano was on him, knee in back, left hand on neck, pushing the now-inert face into the ground, right hand curved back for his knife.

The knife came out. Sondes could not stir.

The dagos, who had wanted to shoot but dared not for fear of hitting Cipriano, pressed forward, ignoring their prisoners, to see the kill.

Cipriano's knife went up.

A revolver cracked; once, twice.

Cipriano abruptly stiffened, an amazed look coming over his face. He swayed backwards. The knife dropped nervelessly to the ground. His hand, with an unexpected suddenness, gripped at his chest. He went over slowly, like a tree falling, and lay beside Martin Sondes.

Lilias Seyler, with Jennifer's revolver in her hand, called in a clear voice:

"If one of you dagos dare look round I will shoot you as I shot Cipriano. Put up your hands!"

Jennifer was also standing up, threatening them. She had discovered Cipriano's pistol in the bushes after a frantic search. She covered the dagos. They had not hesitated to obey Lilias's command. They had seen that shooting; they knew that their upstanding carcasses were better marks than the kneeling Cipriano had been, and they refused to take any sort of risk. Paul and Probyn lost no time in going from man to man and relieving each of his arms. Then

The Brute

Paul stood guard while they examined the men lying on the ground.

Cipriano was quite dead, two bullets through his chest; Sondes was unhurt. They lifted him and carried him to the fire. Probyn diagnosed fever, and suggested quinine.

“And cachassa,” said Martin in a thick voice, opening his heavy eyes. He looked round at them all, took the flask of crude, native rum that Bevis passed him, drank, and coughed as the spirit bit into his throat.

His wits seemed to clear, he eyed them all again; he half started up.

“Where’s Jennifer?” he cried anxiously.

“Holding you, Martin,” she said quietly; and her arms pressed his great shoulders back against her breast. He gave a little sigh, sank gratefully against her, shut his eyes.

He opened them in a minute.

“What happened?” he asked. “I ought to be dead. Shots—I heard shots! Who fired them?”

“I did,” said Liliás quietly. “I picked up Jennifer’s revolver. Cipriano had found it and thrown it on the ground. The dagos were too occupied with the fight to notice me. When Cipriano tried to knife you I shot him.”

He smiled grimly.

“Saved my life again, eh? Want me to thank you and remember it?”

“No,” she said quietly. “I want you to count it as settling up a little account I owe you all. I’d like you to forget what I’ve done—and cry quits.”

The Unseen Stalker

“Quits,” Sondes echoed; and Jennifer said almost as quickly, “Quits, Liliás!”

Martin said:

“I’ll have that quinine now; a strong dose, Bevis. Then pile all the blankets you can on me, and keep the fire going. I’ll sweat this attack of fever out. Keep your eyes on those dagos all the time.”

There was no particular need to do that so long as they held the arms and the upper hand. The Latin-Americans knew just how they stood. They knew that if they gave trouble they would be shot down. They knew that if they attempted to escape it could only be into the jungle, and, as these men were mainly seamen off Gonzala’s ship, they knew better than to run the risk of that. They remained where they were. They were by nature men who must have a leader. After all, it was better to have Senhor Martino as leader than nobody.

Sondes slept through the day. He woke in the evening, the fever gone and his mind clear, but his body still weak. He told them how he had happened to come up with them, and he spoke, it seemed, because he did not want Jennifer to have the pain of telling about her half-brother.

She was beginning to tell him how things had gone astray in the village; how Ralph Felton had made trouble over the canoes, when he said:

“I know. I’ve been in the village. I got there a few hours after you had started out. The *cacique* told me all about it.”

“I guessed you were somewhere about, Martin,”

The Brute

said Paul. "I couldn't see you leaving us at the tender mercies of that——"

"It wasn't exactly that," Sondes interrupted quickly. "I was really after Cipriano's gang. When——when I left you——"

"When *we* left you," said Jennifer firmly.

"When we parted," he compromised, smiling, "I'd made up my mind that I must do something about Cipriano and Co., who must undoubtedly be following you. I decided that I would try to get in touch with them and head them off."

"You had three peons and four donkeys with you?" Paul observed. "Did you expect to fight the lot of them with those forces?"

"I don't know what I intended, exactly," said Sondes. "I rather fancied I would get in among them and talk and bluff them into thinking you had taken some other trail. However, I missed them. I thought they'd come over from Fogasta by our trail, but they themselves seem to have gone astray. They came out on to the Senzala plateau much lower down, and, as luck would have it, struck your trail almost at once. I know that, because I met the Indian who had put them wise. He put me wise, too. He had met your peons and donkeys coming back. He had learnt from them how you were being held up at the villages because of the price of canoe portage. It amused them all, you see, because they knew that the Indians had mentioned nothing like the price you were told they had asked."

The Unseen Stalker

“They knew it was a trick on Ralph’s part to make us steal the canoes,” said Jennifer.

“No, not exactly. They enjoyed it as part of Felton’s cunning to make a little for himself. It is the sort of game they know and enjoy. However, I knew that there was trouble, and I guessed there might be worse if the delay enabled Cipriano to catch up with you. I pressed my men, and went down to the Rio d’Oro by forced marches. When I reached the village I found I was a few hours too late.”

“One minute,” Jennifer said. “I suppose you learnt everything in the village.”

“Pretty well everything,” Martin told her, “the *cacique* wasn’t merely angry with Felton and you, but with Cipriano too. Cipriano had treated him badly. Well, then, I heard the—the reason Cipriano was taking you to the nearest town, and came after you by forced marches. Easy to pick up your trail. And when I got in touch, easier still. Those dagos while marching made enough noise to hide the roar of a waterfall; certainly more than enough to hide my movements.”

“Ah,” said Jennifer, “that is a thing I wanted to know. You were alone?”

“One of my peons had crocked up on the forced march to the village,” he said, as though apologizing for his lack of company. “The other two were rather used up as well. Also, they were scared about coming on.”

“But you weren’t! You weren’t scared about tack-

The Brute

ling Cipriano and Pascobas and Ralph and all their peons single-handed," Jennifer cried.

"I really had no choice," he assured her.

"Except leaving us alone and not risking your own life in a perilous attempt," she commented softly. "After all we—I didn't deserve that you should take so much risk."

"Oh—well, one simply doesn't leave people in the lurch," he answered. "And then, too, I did rather feel that working alone gave me certain distinct advantages. I could fight more effectively and silently than I might with a couple or more blundering peons at my heels. For, you see, I had hit upon a silent plan."

"The blowgun?" asked Jennifer.

"Just that," he said, smiling grimly. "It was the way a single man could even up his chances against a crowd. In fact, it gave me too much of an advantage. I didn't quite like ambushing them back there in the jungle. They were too helpless."

"Not quite that," said Probyn. "They swept that bush with a pistol-fire that must have been rather like machine-gunnery."

"That's so," agreed Martin; "and twice they came precious near getting me. But I rather welcomed it. It made it seem a little less one-sided, although, I must say, they had the luck with them at first. I ought to have got Pascobas that first time. It was a sitter. I was crouching in a tree with the blowgun on a rest ranging on the path. I had the sights on Pascobas, so to speak, for ten good yards, and I missed him with three darts. I hadn't the hang of the

The Unseen Stalker

thing then, you see. I'd tried the blowgun up the Amazon and become a fair shot with it. But that was years ago; also, the pipe I used then wasn't so heavy or long as the one I got in the village on the Rio d'Oro—yes, that's where I got it. However, it mattered very little in the end. Though, I must say, if I'd got Cipriano the first time I'd tried I might have saved you that ugly quarter of an hour with the scoundrel."

"You might have used a pistol," Paul suggested. "You'd have got the lot then."

"Daren't. They got close enough to me as it was. If flash and sound had given them direction they would have riddled me. Besides, there was the moral force of the blowpipe attack. You know what the effect was—you can see the result for yourself. It was impossible for me to get at Cipriano and Felton on the march, after I had killed Pascobas, but the deaths of the other three peons made the rest fall in with Felton's plot to bolt. And that led us to this."

"Did you see Felton get away?" Probyn asked.

"Unfortunately, no." Martin's tone was regretful. "I felt the fever coming, so I took a dose of quinine, propped myself in a tree, and slept. When I woke and saw that most of the camp had gone I was in a blue funk. I thought they'd carried you away secretly, until I saw Cipriano stand up. I was scrambling down my tree when he went mad-dog."

"And you almost threw your life away trying to prevent him from playing mad-dog, while you were not in a condition to fight anyone," said Jennifer softly. "No, don't try to explain that. It isn't really

The Brute

explicable—except that Martin Sondes is Martin Sondes, and built like that.” She looked at him with shining eyes. “And how did the fever come? Over-exposure, too little food, no fire at nights, risks run in swampy jungle?”

“When one travels the lone hand off the main track, one has to take on all that sort of thing,” he said.

“One has to,” she mocked gently. “But would anyone else have dared it?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And brought it off?” she said. “I don’t think so. No one but Martin Sondes.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

FELTON PAYS

MARTIN SONDES was so far recovered next morning that they were able to move off once more.

They had had a long consultation about ways and means, which turned out to be all ways and no means. Jennifer was veritably the poor little rich girl. She could, if necessary, draw on anything up to £20,000 by telegraph. There are, however, few telegraph offices in the jungle. As things stood she and her companions had not enough to buy a meal at the next village, for Felton and his scoundrels had taken not merely the money in the packets but also the very cash in their pockets. Martin Sondes himself was no better off.

True, the need for spending money in the jungle is a rarity, but occasionally it is imperative. It was now. To get down the river to San Anjo and safety they would need money, and a great deal of it. Martin made it plain that in no other way would they get canoe portage. It was evident that, unlike Felton, he did not think it the custom of the country to take canoes by force.

The only alternative to canoeing was marching, and therefore they marched. They were travelling light, but even then their progress was exacting and tor-

The Brute

turing in that thick, sticky, smelly heat. It was also an education. They were able to learn how easily they would have died if they had trusted themselves to the jungle in order to escape from Cipriano.

That jungle, apparently teeming with life, apparently full of things to eat, was yet starvation to the uninitiated. It was Sondes who found and pointed out the capybara which they never would have seen, for this forest pig takes to a creek at the slightest alarm, and walks along the bottom with only the tip of its nose showing.

It was Sondes who brought in the jaboty, the forest turtle, when even the peons went empty-handed; it was he who discovered the yellow, mushy, sour-sweet abiu fruit, and the bacate pear and the whole range of rather insipid, edible fruits from the mango to the bacaba and pupunha. It was Sondes who showed them the secret of the *cipo d'agua*, the water vine, which, at a slash of the knife, would "bleed" a stream of clear water in a jungle where the only other water was dangerous with fever-germs.

Martin Sondes was their strength all through. He led them, he dominated the peons, he bolstered up the courage and the energy of the whole party all through that trying march. He fought down his own fever and exacted more from himself than from the rest.

And yet, as they marched, it became apparent that the women, at least, were not able to bear the strain. Jungle conditions are hard enough for men; they were proving too hard for the women. The necessity of finding some means of transport had become impera-

Felton Pays

tive by the time they reached the banks of the Rio d'Oro, well below the old Indian village where Felton had been so treacherous, for there were still many days of jungle marching. Round the campfire Sondes voiced a new plan.

"We must go into the next village, and try to negotiate for canoes in some way. We must try and persuade them that they will be able to collect their hire from the *Evelyn Hope* when they get down to San Anjo. In fact, I think I can arrange it."

"I thought these Indians were rather suspicious and dangerous?" Jennifer observed.

"They are," said Martin. "It won't be a simple proposition, Jennifer. Such is the state of commercial honesty in this land that one can get very few Indians to risk anything unless they see the colour of one's money in advance, or at least some of it. Experience has taught them that it would be the easiest thing in the world for us to repudiate our bargain at San Anjo, and, since they would be strangers in that town, there would be little chance of their obtaining justice. So they will demand half or more of the hire money for their canoes and rowers in advance—unless we can persuade them otherwise."

"Do you think you can persuade them?" Jennifer asked.

"I think so," Sondes assured her. "I shall offer to stay in the village while you go down to San Anjo."

"Oh!" said Jennifer, taken aback.

"A sort of hostage?" Paul Glen suggested.

The Brute

"It's absurd!" Jennifer cried. "I won't allow that!"

"It is the only way out."

"And if anything happened to you?" she cried, her face showing pale through the firelight.

"What can happen to me? Nothing!"

"Something might happen to us—an accident on the river. What then?"

"Nothing will happen to you."

"If it did?"

"Oh, one must take some risk; you as well as I."

"What *would* happen to you?" demanded Jennifer.

"A Latin-American jail as a debt-defaulter," said Liliias smoothly. "The sort of jail from which he rescued Ralph Felton."

"Is that so?" asked Jennifer.

"Don't let's look on the ugly side. You'll get down to San Anjo all right."

"It's impossible! I—we won't think of it."

"Also," said Glen quietly, "we are again in Fogasta. And in Fogasta they are still hunting for the escaped convict, Buckingham, and the man who helped him to escape."

"Don't bring that up," Sondes protested.

"I think it must be brought up," said Jennifer. "I think we must know the dangers which you are suggesting we should allow you to take—for us. What would happen if those soldiers hunting for Ralph found you?"

"They won't find me!"

Felton Pays

“They might. What would happen to you, Martin?”

“I don’t know. Jail, I suppose.”

“That means,” said Paul tersely, “that you suppose nothing of the sort, Martin. I know your habit of offering the least painful alternative when speaking of yourself. You told me that the dagos here have a bright habit of carving escaped prisoners, and so forth, to pieces.”

“Is that a fact?” Jennifer asked, in horror.

“Yes,” said Probyn, before Sondes could answer. “It’s a fact, Jennifer. What is more, they owe Martin something for getting the guard punished. I’ll not be a party to allowing him to take such a risk.”

“None of us will,” said Jennifer. “If we can’t get those canoes by some other method we all stay, or continue the march as we are.”

But they did not continue the march exactly as they were. Just before dawn they were all awakened by the sound of firing.

Down the river, possibly at the very village they were making for, there was some sort of affray going on. They heard the hammer of shooting coming faintly but unmistakably over the thick jungle distance. At first there were a few shots, then brisk firing from a score of weapons, then the noise died down and went out.

“It sounds like an Indian affair of some sort,” said Martin Sondes. “A clash of dagos and Indians, I think. There were modern weapons going off just now and sporting guns, and even old Martinis—judg-

The Brute

ing by the noise. That sounds as though Indians with an odd collection of guns were in it."

He was rather worried. Something had happened in the village that might mean danger. It might only mean that a drinking bout had flared up into a free fight, and that they would find the natives sick and sullen, but it might mean that the Indians had had a brush with bad men or even troops and were vindictive. It was even likely that Felton, making for San Anjo, too, was at his evil tricks again.

He resolved to go cautiously and, when they started their march, sent the best woodsmen of Cipriano's peons—now quite friendly—ahead to smell out the land. All moved forward cautiously through the gloomy jungle passes.

So they marched for an hour or two. Then quite abruptly Sondes, who was leading, stopped the march. They heard nothing, but some sound had caught his quick ears. On his instructions they scattered into the bush beside the path and waited.

Presently they heard the quick shuffle of feet along the path. They looked out. They saw a man pushing forward, rifle ready, furtively on the alert. Their fingers twisted nervously over their pistol triggers. Then another man came, holding up a fellow who yawed and staggered as he walked. He was obviously wounded and almost helpless. They wondered what was the matter. Then they saw Martin Sondes talking to the men.

Two of them were those they had sent ahead to smell out the land. The other:

Felton Pays

“It is Fillipe,” said one of their own peons. “He is one of those who went off with the sly senhor that night before you came, Dom Martino. We found him on the road a few hundred yards on. He will die, of course, but we brought him back because he can talk yet.”

One of Felton’s men! They stared at him. They already guessed that it meant some fresh villany of Ralph’s.

Martin asked sharply what had happened.

“We were attacked as we tried to get away in canoes this morning,” said the wounded peon. “There was trouble between the senhor and the *cacique*. He would not pay for the canoes. They came out at us and shot at us. We killed a few but they were too many. I fell close to a hut, and crept under it. When they were quiet I crawled away.”

“And the senhor Felton?” asked Martin.

“They have him.”

“Dead?”

“No, he is alive. They have him and they are very pleased at it. They will teach him to be a cheat.”

Martin’s face became grim. He shot a glance at Jennifer. He knew exactly what that teaching would mean. Even though he loathed Felton he shuddered at the thought of the lesson those barbarous Indians would deal out to a white man.

For a minute Sondes stood frowning, thinking of the best thing to do. There were two problems to face. The first, the saving of Jennifer and her party from the infuriated Indians. That should be accom-

The Brute

plished easily enough. A wide détour through the bush while the savages were occupied with Felton would be a safe course.

There was, however, the problem of Felton. The Indians had him, but they had him alive. If they had killed him out of hand, if they *would* only kill him out of hand, Martin would not have worried greatly. The man probably deserved death now as he had deserved it many times. He could not pretend that the killing of the fellow was anything but justice. But torturing, as the Indians meant to torture him, was another matter. However much one hated a man one could not let him suffer in that way, without lifting a finger to help him.

Still Martin had four white lives to consider, to say nothing of the dagos. If he went to Felton's rescue he risked them. Had he a right to do it? He debated. Felton, after all, had got into this hole himself; Felton had been the cause of enough danger as it was. Was it fair to Jennifer and the rest to take this new risk?

Jennifer said abruptly:

"The man said they had captured Ralph, didn't he?"

"Yes, they've got him."

"Is he hurt?"

Martin grasped at this. The fellow might be badly hurt and so could not last long. He rapped a question at the dying peon.

No, Felton was not hurt, not a scratch. He had kept well under cover during the fighting. He was

Felton Pays

unwounded and would last to the last refinement of torture.

“Well, that’s all right,” said Jennifer with relief, for she did not know what Felton faced. “If he is unharmed then he does not need any attention from us.”

She thought that solved the problem of their movements. They would run no more risks for her half-brother, even if he were taken into captivity. She looked at Martin and saw the worry in his face.

“But you don’t agree?” she said. “You think perhaps we ought to rescue him. Why?”

Martin felt he could not tell her. As he stood thinking what to say, as they stood silent, a scream came floating to them through the deep stillness of the jungle. It was distant, muffled, yet piercing and full of terror. Jennifer shivered and glanced at Martin.

“Ralph?” she whispered.

The scream came again and again, quick, abandoned in its terror.

“Yes,” he said frowning. He turned, counting heads. At a pinch he could split the party and make a dash into the village while the Indians were occupied with Ralph Felton. He might thus take them by surprise, and effect a rescue.

“They are doing something to him?” asked Jennifer.

“Yes,” he said.

He decided he would take Paul and the three huskiest of Cipriano’s men.

The Brute

"I wonder!" she said. "He is the sort who yells at anything, I think."

Martin looked at her. He was startled that she should say that, that she should speak with such contempt of her half-brother. She understood his look. She said evenly: "I know Ralph now. I do not believe him, even when he screams."

"I'm afraid he has reason," said Martin.

"Are you sure?" she demanded.

The situation was extraordinary. Their positions were utterly reversed. It was he who had to take the side of Ralph Felton now against her—her!

"Yes, I'm sure," he said.

"You must be quite certain," she said. "After all, there are lives here that count more than the fright of Ralph Felton."

He looked at her. She saw what he was thinking. She said urgently:

"I *do* know him now, Martin, for the worthless brute he is. And I don't want any more misleading or trickery from a man like that. I will make no more attempts to help him, unless you say it is necessary."

"I think this time it *is* necessary."

"But I won't have you risk your life for a man like that, Martin. Not *your* life."

She looked at him, bright-eyed, proud, confiding, blushing. He read all that he most wanted to know in her glance, and for a moment he wavered. Why not take what was offered? Why risk losing the thing he counted most in the world to go to the aid of a

Felton Pays

wretch who was better dead, who might be well on his way to death even now? For a moment his manhood was tempted.

Then Felton, who had been silent for a little while, rent the still air with a series of blood-curdling screams.

Jennifer's hands went up to her ears instinctively.

"What are they doing?" she cried. "It sounds as though they were torturing him."

"They *are* torturing him," said Sondes crisply. "Paul and you, you and you,"—he selected his men—"come, we will deal with these dogs. Bevis, I look to you to guard these ladies——"

"We'll come," said Jennifer firmly.

"You cannot. It's impossible."

"We come," she insisted. "It will mean two extra pistol-hands—to say nothing of the extra peons. You'll need us all, I think."

"It's no job for women."

"We'll come," Jennifer repeated firmly. The distant screaming beat upward horribly. "Martin, we mean to come." As he hesitated she herself set off down the path at a run.

They all followed. Martin came level with her, but did not attempt to turn her back. He gave short orders to her and to Bevis and the others. Paul and his three men came ahead with him; the women remained in the middle. Probyn and his four peons brought up the rear.

They broke from the jungle on to a great rolling space leading down to the water's edge. At the river

The Brute

was a straggling village of crazy houses, some walled, some mere roofs on stilts. They saw vaguely in the centre a mass of Indians gathered. They were packed in a mob, and they were laughing, the rare, guttural laugh of their race. And from the midst of them and their laughter came the screams.

Martin paused for a minute to give his instructions. He and Paul were to go into that mass of Indians, the others were to scatter in a circle, and, if it came to it, to fire from all points into the village and frighten the Indians into imagining they were surrounded by a great force.

He gave them full time to get to their posts. Then quietly and calmly, followed by Paul, he walked into the village and straight at the natives.

At first they were not seen. The Indians were intent on their sport. They were, indeed, able to approach close enough to see what was happening to Ralph Felton. So far as they could see nothing had been done yet save to frighten the fellow. He was bound, spread eagle, to the side of a house. The Indians were gathered about twenty feet away from him. One by one they were taking turns to let fly at him through blowguns. As yet they were not trying to hit him. That was obvious. With exquisite shooting they were outlining his body with the delicate little darts. There was a forest of darts round his rigidly held head. More were round arms and hands. There were even darts in his hair and in his clothes—but beautifully placed so that the wretched man

Felton Pays

would feel all the pangs of death without there being any great risk of it.

That there was a certain amount of risk Martin knew, and Ralph knew too well. A bad shot, a shot too fine, a scratch, even, and Ralph Felton was a dead man, for those darts might be poisoned. They might not be, of course, for it might be part of the Indians' grim joke to torture him to screams with harmless weapons, and they guessed that Felton would feel that those darts were deadly, and they were right; that was why he was screaming. He screamed again as they watched, for another dart had "phutted" into the wood no more than a graze from his neck. He twisted his head and saw Martin Sondes.

It was characteristic of the fellow that he was ready to ruin all chances of rescue in sheer panic-desire to save his skin. He did that at once. Instead of remaining silent to allow Martin to work out a plan for his deliverance he yelled:

"Martin Sondes! . . . Martin Sondes, save me!"

The Indians saw Martin and Paul, but they were so startled by the unexpected sight of these two big white men in their very midst that they backed away like scared sheep. They were ready to bolt, for they well knew how terrible could be the vengeance that followed pleasures like theirs. A wide circle cleared about them. Only the *cacique*, an old, grim man, stood firm. And he saw that there were but two white men. He called to the others, and the Indians, staying their flight, turned with weapons ready.

It was a moment when death was balanced on the

The Brute

flutter of an eyelid. The *cacique* tried to bring that about by his cold stare into Martin's eyes. It was his own that dropped.

He said hoarsely :

“What do you want with us?”

“You shall see,” said Martin evenly. He walked calmly to Ralph Felton, bent, and with his knife cut the bonds of his right ankle.

A gasp of rage lifted over the mass of the Indians. Weapons came up. Martin stood coolly, his glance running over them with grim unconcern. For a moment they poised, staring at each other.

Paul's heart was hammering. Could Martin carry it off? Could he, by sheer force of will, bind them? Would he dare go on with all those weapons poised to slay?

Martin deliberately turned his back on the Indians. He bent calmly and Ralph Felton's left foot was free.

The Indians sucked breath audibly and shuffled backward. They were terrified. Such courage awed them. They could not believe that any man would risk the hundred deaths they had in store for him with such unconcern. It was not even fear of some hidden consequences that held them spellbound. Just the sheer, quiet audacity of the thing hypnotized them.

The *cacique* croaked :

“That man is ours. He has done wrong.”

Martin looked at him over his shoulder: “I will speak with you presently,” he said. He went to Ralph's left hand and cut it free. Without turning

Felton Pays

he took two steps across Felton and the right hand was free.

The Indians did not move. The cold daring of the act had mastered them.

Martin turned with grim placidity and faced the *cacique* and the Indians. Whatever his anxieties he showed only frigid determination. He knew that the situation was touch and go. If he could maintain his mastery he might be able to extricate not only Ralph Felton but the whole of the party from this ugly situation with honour rather than danger. He began to talk firmly to the *cacique*, reading a lecture to the man before his own village on the evil thing he had done, and the consequences he had risked. Thus, he felt, he could dominate and hold them.

But he had reckoned without Ralph Felton. Ralph Felton free had not even the courage to bear a moment's risk—even to save himself. His was the craven fibre that has caused all the panics and death since the world began. He was free . . . with but a few steps between himself and complete immunity. He meant to win that immunity. Suddenly he had snatched a pistol from Martin's holster and was bolting, darting like a scared pariah-dog for the nearest opening between two houses.

And with his first movement came death.

Movement created movement. The spell broke. The Indians woke to life. There was an outburst of yells, of hoarse screams of rage. Weapons began to go off. At the first touch of the panic Martin had realized the situation. His foot went out and kicked

The Brute

Paul's feet from under him. He fell to the ground as Paul fell, and, calling to his companion, crawled quickly to get into the shelter of an angle of the house against which Felton had been lashed.

They were able to reach cover because the first thoughts of the Indians had been for Felton. They heard arrows whistle, and guns bump off. They just had time to see the panic-stricken fool leap wildly into the air with three long arrows in his back, and bullet wounds on him. Then they, too, were fighting for life.

Martin had brought two pistols. He had the second one out. In two quick shots he had dropped the *cacique* with a bullet in the calf, and a vigorous-looking man who looked like the second head man with a shot in the thigh. Paul dropped one man and missed quite a lot in the flurry, but the shooting and the sudden loss of their leaders had deprived the Indians of initiative. They hesitated and then made only a half-hearted attack as the *cacique* yelled from the ground. Arrows came sizzling and guns pumped off with terrific bangs, slugs and bullets were tearing up the ground round the two men. One bullet whipped through the triceps of Martin's left arm, but the pistol in his right hand did not cease to fire. One—two—three—four it went, and four men toppled. Paul's pistols blazed, too, but firing from the ground is not easy work and he hit fewer than he frightened. But frightening was as good work as hitting under the circumstances, and the Indians again were checked. They poised ready to bolt even when the

Felton Pays

cacique raised himself on his elbow to lash them onward with bitter words.

But they never came on. From all round the village there came a blaze of firing. Ten pistols and guns loosing off as fast as fingers could work them sent terror as well as bullets into the village. Shots tore in from front and rear and side, hitting shacks mainly with unpleasant noises, but hitting Indians, too. The noise of that firing was as the noise of whole regiments in action. It came swiftly nearer and there was shouting, some of it unmistakably feminine, but the Indians had no time to note the fact.

The Indians were breaking. Martin and Paul on the ground joined vigorously in the tumult, judiciously laming and dropping the more resolute of the natives. The uproar of shooting and cheers was upon the village. Enemies seemed to pour in from all sides between the houses. The Indians broke and bolted.

They went streaming into the jungle in wild panic, choosing the free river-road. They did not even leave the women and children behind—only the wounded. Cipriano's dagos fired after them with immense zest but with no particular marksmanship, and their panic was complete.

As for Martin Sondes, he looked up to see Jennifer running towards him. He gave her a pale smile, then his head dropped on to his arm. Fever and wounds had been too much for him. He had fainted.

CHAPTER XXIX

GLAMOUR

ALL was plain sailing after the fight in the village. With Felton dead, all that Felton had meant was done with. And with the recovery of the money their way to San Anjo and the *Evelyn Hope* was made smooth. It was also immediately necessary. Not only was it dangerous to remain within striking distance of the Indians, but also Martin's wounded arm needed skilled attention.

The wounded Martin interviewed the wounded *cacique*, and, to the astonishment of the savage, bought canoes at a generous figure. These were worked downstream without mishap by the peons. During the three days of river travelling Martin suffered great pain, but once on the deck of his own schooner, and after a doctor had attended him for a few days, he began to recover.

In the week of sailing along the coast to Belem, where the party was to pick up a liner for their return to civilization, he almost regained his old vitality.

And yet he was not quite the same man. He was as strong as ever, as dominant as ever; he was, in a way, more companionable than he had been, but this air of friendliness masked an impenetrable reserve. Especially to Jennifer did he seem reserved.

Glamour

On the last day of the trip, when they expected to pick up the landmarks of Belem at any moment, Jennifer stood alone by the break of the poop, aloof from the others, thinking of the strange reserve Martin had shown to her since they had come abroad, heart-sore at it, yet understanding it.

Away to starboard the jungle lay brooding and mysterious under the dying sun. The stark, crude richness of the sunset was filling the world with a golden glamour. The air was soft. The off-shore breeze carried to her the deep, strange scents of tropic undergrowths. She almost fancied she heard the bearded monkeys calling, saw the strange jewel-shine of rare exotic flowers glowing amid the trees.

The schooner lilted gently, gently upon a sleepy sea. It was a bright sea quick with an eloquence of colouring. . . . A lovely sea eternal and strong in its beauty. A sea that made a glory of its service. Jennifer gazed down on it, felt its immense appeal, was one with it. It was her sea. . . . Her sea as it was Martin's sea.

And yet Martin was avoiding her. Holding her at arm's length. He was down there on the main deck, giving orders, standing four-square and splendid, and pretending not to see her. . . . She called to him. "Martin! Martin?"

He came up to her slowly.

"What is it, Jennifer?"

She laughed softly at him: "You are saying in your heart. 'Well, we'd better get it over.'"

The Brute

He looked at her steadily: "Well, we'd better, Jennifer," he said.

"And yet you—you didn't make a move. What was it to be with you—just a handshake on the quay at Belem, and a 'Thank you' and all over?"

"Don't you think that would be the best way?"

"Isn't it too tame an ending for all the things we've faced?"

"No, rather a natural beginning for the life you are to live, the cultured life, the civilized life, the seemly and comfortable life amid people and in places of the kind that are naturally yours by birth and breeding."

"A life you despise?"

"It's not my life, Jennifer," he said quietly. "I neither despise it nor admire it—it's just not my life. You know me as I am, rough, downright, unpolished. I don't fit into that life. I fit in—*here*. . . ."

"Yes," breathed Jennifer, "you fit in here."

"This is my world, I cannot easily break from it. Sailing these coasts, fighting these seas, passing up and down these great rivers in the tropic sun. Doing a little trade—doing a little good, maybe, but, nevertheless, just jogging along on my little round doing as best I can the job I am fitted for. That's all I am."

"A fine life," she breathed, "a splendid life—rather a noble life. . . . I'm in love with it, Martin."

"Jennifer!" he said as though in pain.

"Yes, I'm in love with it," she went on. "I can see this lovely schooner passing up and down this strange

and mysterious coast when we are gone . . . doing things. Doing things—not existing for an empty purpose . . . accomplishing something for the world. Bringing trade and fair dealing to backward peoples, giving them that bit of help that helps along civilization, helping forward bit by bit the great force of progress . . . doing something . . . helping to make useful citizens of the world . . . being worth while instead of worth nothing. Do you wonder why I love the life—want it—don't want to leave it?"

"Don't look at it with eyes of glamour, Jennifer," he said huskily. "See it true, it's hardships, trials, discomforts—dangers. It has all those."

"Haven't I been tasting them? Aren't they the things that give it strength, make it worth while? Martin, haven't I learned that the hard things have more savour than the soft? That insipid, artificial, meaningless life at home. . . . I never liked it, I always hated it, the pettiness, the uselessness of it. That's why I came out here, my heart cried out to *do* at least something real and worth while in my life. Even trying to rescue Ralph was doing something. Can't you see, I'm a doer? I want to go on doing, I won't be condemned to that old empty life."

"But the hardness of this," said Martin, standing with hands clenched on the rails, his rugged face grim. "Heats, storms, privations, the threat of ruffians like Cipriano. Your beauty amid these surroundings—no men fit to talk to you. . . . The discomfort of being ever at sea in a cramped craft. Its lack of civilization, its dearth of amenities. . . ."

The Brute

"It's capacity for doing," she smiled at him. "The good, honest, fine sense of work, of facing things and winning . . . of helping. . . . I want that life, Martin."

"It's too hard for a woman like you."

"I'm asking for it, Martin," she whispered.

He was silent.

"Martin. . . . I am asking something. . . . Won't you help me?"

"Yes, I love you," he said almost violently. "You know that, Jennifer. You know it without my saying I love you. No woman has ever touched me as you have touched me. No woman is so lovely, no woman is so fine. I love you. . . . I can't bear the thought that I shall lose you and your sweetness tomorrow—only tomorrow. I've had pictures of you, and me—doing things together, standing here, arm about shoulder, watching endless sunsets on these seas, watching the coast slide quick and mysterious along the counter, of slipping into strange creeks and seeing lost, little towns. Of doing things together in sweet and splendid companionship. . . . Trusting each other, leaning on each other, drawing strength and courage and sweetness from each other. . . . I've dreamed of it. I've wanted it. . . . You have a right to know. But you must go home tomorrow. It is not for one like you, and I see it true. . . . Because I love you, Jennifer."

She came and stood against him.

"Martin, dear," she whispered, "that is what I

Glamour

wanted. I stay with you. . . . I love you like that, dear.”

“No, because I love you I can’t let you risk this life. It’s not fitted. . . .”

“I love you, Martin,” she whispered.

“You with your breeding, your upbringing, your gentleness and fastidiousness, beauty and grace could not endure. . . .”

“I love you, Martin,” she whispered.

“It is impossible. I cannot allow. . . .”

“Bend your head, Martin. I want to kiss you. . . .”

“Jennifer,” he almost groaned, “you don’t understand. . . .”

“Hold me tight . . . your cheek against mine, dear. . . . Your great arm round my shoulders. Oh, Martin! why have you kept me waiting so long for this?”

“Jennifer,” he said huskily. “My dear . . . my dear. I can’t let you. . . .”

“I love you, Martin. . . . We love each other. . . . There *isn’t* anything else that matters. Ah, hold me tight like that . . . tighter. . . . And always, dear. . . . And never let me go.”

(1)

THE END

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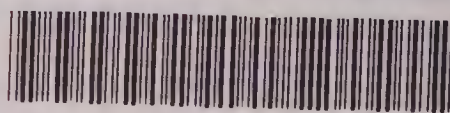
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